GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO WRESTLING SAFETY STUDY

The Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism, the Honourable Eric Robinson, the Minister of Labour and Immigration, the Honourable Nancy Allen, and the Minister responsible for the Liquor Control Act, the Honourable Scott Smith, are pleased to release the results of the report on the recently commissioned 'Study of Safety in Professional Wrestling in Manitoba'.

The report provides a comprehensive picture of the challenges faced by pro wrestling in managing and maintaining safety standards within the industry. In particular, the Ministers wish to commend the consulting group, Broad Range Alternative Talent, and its Principal Consultant, Martin Boroditsky, for their diligence in producing a report which fully reflects the study's Terms of Reference approved by the Government last spring. The Ministers are also satisfied with the efforts made by the consulting group to include all interested voices in the study process – through interviews, public meetings and written submissions.

The Ministers also stressed the Government's intention that the purpose of the study was to assist the industry to identify safety issues and consider actions that the industry could undertake to improve safety standards and practices.

In responding to the report on behalf of the Government, the Ministers wish to reiterate the Government's existing perspective on the wrestling industry outlined in the Terms of Reference. Manitoba considers staged combative displays such as performance-style wrestling, where outcomes are predetermined, not to be sport, are not subject to the Prize Fighting provisions of the Criminal Code of Canada, and are not subject to regulation by the Manitoba Boxing Commission. The Province ceased regulating wrestling in 1996. Performance-style wrestling is one of those elements of the entertainment industry where the work entails athleticism and physical risk, along with movie stunt work, circus performances, theatrical stage fighting and similar activities. The Ministers note that this context was well understood and reinforced by the consulting group in its consultations with the industry.

The report contains a number of recommendations for improving safety standards and practices within Manitoba's local wrestling industry. Most of the recommendations call for actions to be taken by the industry itself. The Ministers view this emphasis as entirely appropriate, in that it reflects the way other high-risk elements of the entertainment industry deal with safety. Industry self-regulation, rather than government regulation, is the approach recommended in the report, and the Government agrees.

The Government encourages the industry to give serious consideration to the report's recommendations calling for establishment of an industry-based safety council to monitor and promote safety. Recommendations calling for consistency in ring construction and maintenance standards, training requirements and participation of under-age performers also merit the industry's careful consideration.

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With respect to recommendations regarding the role of the provincial government, and particularly recommendations relating to the Department of Labour and Immigration and the Workplace Safety and Health Act, the Government is satisfied that the recent legislation and regulations adopted in 2002 provide an adequate mechanism to deal with any specific safety and health matters arising within the wrestling workplace. The legislation puts an increased degree of responsibility on venue owners and employers to maintain adequate safety standards in the workplace, whether those in the workplace are employees, self-employed contractors or volunteers. The Department of Labour and Immigration is prepared to assist members of the wrestling industry with any questions they may have about the Province's legislation and its implications for safety in the workplace.

The Government notes the challenges faced by the industry with respect to obtaining appropriate insurance coverage. As with other industries that face similar challenges, it would not be appropriate for the Government to intervene. The industry's own follow-up on recommendations within the report should position the sector for productive discussions with current or potential insurers.

With respect to recommendations of potential interest at the local government level, the Government will be sharing this information with the Association of Manitoba Municipalities and encourages the industry to discuss safety concerns directly with local government officials.

The Ministers summarized the Province's response to the report as follows:

The scope of the Government's current legislation, policies and programs provides an adequate context within which the industry can move to address the safety issues identified by the industry through the report, and to solicit help from the Province in this regard. No new legislation, policies or programs are contemplated by the Government in relation to the safety of pro wrestling.

The Government stresses the need and responsibility for all workers in all industries, including pro wrestling, to be vigilant and proactive in matters of safety. The Government expects the wrestling industry to give safety issues the same kind of attention and consideration that other high risk areas of the entertainment sector do. The Government sees the industry itself as the primary driver of any move to enhance safety standards and practices, and welcomes the industry's own proactivity and professionalism in this area. Indeed, as the report points out, the challenges presented by the current insurance liability coverage environment make it imperative that the industry act in its own best interests to promote safety.

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The Government encourages the industry to adopt minimum standards for safety, particularly in relation to training, ring construction and the participation of youth. The Government further encourages the industry to establish some form of self-regulatory mechanism, such as the proposed "safety council", to monitor, promote and manage safety issues within the industry.

The Government notes that some of the recommendations speak to the roles of other current or potential safety partners, such as local governments, and encourages the industry to explore those recommendations directly with those groups.

Inquiries with respect to the report can be directed to Diane Coble-Kendall at 945-3811. Information about the Province's Workplace Safety and Health Act can be obtained from Manitoba's Department of Labour and Immigration at 204-945-3446, The full report is available through Manitoba's Legislative Libraries at 200 Vaughan Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3C 1T5, 204-945-4330, or on-line at http://www.gov.mb.ca/govresp.html.

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Wrestling Safety in Manitoba
Study Report

November 1, 2003

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On June 13th, 2003, Broad Range Alternative Talent was contracted by the Minister of Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Tourism to conduct a review of safety standards and practices in the wrestling industry in Manitoba, and to bring forward recommendations.

The scope of our study was directed in the following areas:

Performer preparation, training and qualifications
-age and health status
-drug and alcohol use
-preparation and training
-performance requirements relative to skill levels
-fatigue levels and recovery times

Venues and equipment
-security and crowd control
-crew training and qualifications
-set-up, condition monitoring and maintenance
-on-site medical services
-safety and contingency planning

Event programming
-risk assessment procedures
-risk containment strategies
-contingency planning

In examining the above, the study identified:

current standards and practices
current roles and responsibilities
issues and shortcomings
remediation strategies

The Manitoba wrestling industry has existed in various forms since the 1920's and is currently comprised of approximately a dozen promoters, who hold their events on a varied schedule ranging from a few times per week to only a few events per year. There are about 120 individuals who perform as wrestlers, referees or in other roles; a few are nationally recognized talents. The majority of current performers have entered the industry since deregulation and many are still learning their craft.

In 1996, the switch from regulation to deregulation impacted an entire generation of experienced wrestlers. Many left Manitoba or quit the business due to concern over declining standards. A new generation of wrestlers and promoters emerged after deregulation, significant in numbers but less grounded in the traditional standards and practices of safety from earlier years.

Our study has found that the vital traditional professional wrestling culture of mentorship and safe practices passed down from veterans and experienced promoters to new participants has eroded. What is left is a downward spiral regarding safety standards in performer qualifications and training, and in event management.

More disturbing is the appearance and popularity of what is known as "backyard wrestling" whose culture of dangerous stunts and thrill-seeking is seeping into wrestling promotions and blurring the distinctions between those who are qualified to perform in a professional wrestling match in a ring, and those who are underqualified.

Many of the issues identified have contributed to a situation where third party liability insurance is becoming unobtainable or unaffordable for many promoters, thereby threatening the future of the sector and the safety of venues including community centres and bars, of performers and of spectators. The adoption of standardized safe practices by the industry may be key to easing the concerns of underwriters and ensuring promoters can access affordable policies of insurance in the future. Part of this process may also involve determining the circumstances under which underage performers are used on live events, and the overall quality of training and risk management.

Injuries in training and bouts are part of the profession. Ensuring the fitness of participants through an annual medical examination, and enacting response and treatment protocols can serve to protect the industry and prevent a tragedy in the future.

Provincial and Municipal legislation may have impact on the conduct of event and match safety and venue operations, and on the conditions of employment for underage performers. At present the wrestling industry may be operating beneath the radar of some agencies, particularly those who are complaint-driven.

Regulated jurisdictions in Canada and the U.S.A., which utilize Boxing Commissions to supervise pro wrestling, do not generally address the serious safety concerns which the industry is currently facing, or address the questions of proper training or safe ring technology. Promotions elsewhere tend to rely on experienced professional personnel to guide match content and event operations.

In Manitoba, professional wrestling is operated as an entertainment production. The safety standards and practices of the broader entertainment community such as stuntmen and theatre, is geared to protecting the performer and minimizing the risk of an insurance claim. This culture of safety awareness may be adapted to the wrestling industry.

Our study group has put forward 27 recommendations for implementation by the pro wrestling industry, the province of Manitoba and municipalities. The majority are in areas of training and event safety standards and practices, promoter and performer licensing, safe ring specifications, mandatory valid third party liability insurance, underage performers, and government oversight.

Foremost is the recommendation that the wrestling industry develop self-regulation through an inclusive and democratically elected Safety and Standards Council within 12 months, which could enact many of the study recommendations. There are recommendations for interim measures including the formation of a volunteer Council with the Province's assistance.

As well there are recommendations for the Province to circulate our findings with the Federal and other governments, to resolve the patchwork quilt of regulation which results in inconsistent safety practices being imported and exported between provinces.

INDUSTRY OVERVIEW

Background

The professional wrestling industry in Manitoba has operated since the early 1920s, changing in style and popularity with the times. The Manitoba Boxing Act regulated the conduct of wrestling starting in the early 30's, even though this was a period when the performance of pro-wrestling was becoming more and more choreographed. Even at this early time the lumping-in of prize fighting with the theatrical art of pro wrestling was seen by many as inappropriate and was criticized in the major newspapers.

As major out-of-province touring groups emerged and competed for the larger audiences in the 1950's and 60's, a Winnipeg club scene formed a feeder and development system. The American-based operations came to dominate the arena market and drew thousands, while the locals barnstormed at smaller venues and drew hundreds. However by 1992 the Canadian regional promotions and the U.S. company that ran Manitoba as part of its Midwest territory were all out of business.

The gentlemen's agreements of the 1950's that underpinned the territorial system gave way to US national touring groups that took over the arena venues, bought TV time and offered guaranteed contracts to talent, in an effort to monopolize the high end of the industry. National touring resulted in a reduction in the number of "major league" appearances in Winnipeg, going from 12 in 1985, to perhaps 2 or 3 by 1995. This reduction of live events fueled the perception within the local industry that there was an unmet demand for fans to see live, rather than TV, wrestling. "As true wrestling fans know, the essence of professional wrestling is the live wrestling show".

In the present day, World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) of Stamford, CT, draws huge weekly television ratings, and is the "brand name of pro wrestling" in North America, attracting audiences to its 3 or 4 annual Manitoba live events that rival attendance at NHL hockey games. At the local level there is fierce competition between about a dozen locally-based independent promotions for slices of a relatively small regional pie. They also provide practically the only opportunity for aspiring Manitoba performers to learn their craft, to network with Canadian wrestlers passing through Manitoba, and to gain experience.

Many WWE performers who are now worldwide stars, such as Chris Jerico (Chris Irvine, of Winnipeg), Edge (Adam Copeland), and Lance Storm (Lance Evers), spent crucial stages of their early careers on the Manitoba "indy" scene. As well Manitoba-developed wrestlers are stars in Japan, Mexico and Puerto Rico and occasionally return to appear on local shows. Others local wrestlers headline independent productions across Canada. Of all the Manitoba wrestlers, the most famous is Roddy Piper who has headlined Pay per Views for all the major US companies and has starred in action films. It is clear that the Manitoba industry can provide a genuine opportunity for dedicated individuals to achieve success at various levels of the wrestling and entertainment business.

In 1991 a Provincial Auditors Report into the Manitoba Boxing and Wrestling Commission's (MBWC) financial, regulatory and licensing practices resulted in the Manitoba government removing professional wrestling from the Boxing Act , eliminating MBWC authority over the wrestling industry. The decision to deregulate pro wrestling eliminated all entry requirements, licensing and other government oversight of the wrestling industry.

To allow for a better understanding of the general structure of a wrestling promotion, we have provided the following synopsis of the job titles involved and their responsibilities.

Roles in pro wrestling events
Owner - this would be an individual who owns, either in its entirety or a majority of, a wrestling promotion company. An owner identified solely as such may be responsible for business operations such as paying bills but is generally NOT involved in day to day decisions about personnel, booking (scripting) decisions or wrestling/in-ring matters.

Promoter - there are two kinds of promoters. Occasionally a *"mark"* promoter, that is an individual who does not come from within the locker rooms of the industry, may find a venue, arrange for advertising, etc., and put on a wrestling event. They may either contract an established promotion to find wrestlers and then leave the direction of them to a booker at the event.

More commonly, a promoter will be a former wrestler or referee who will be more "hands-on" in hiring and firing, directing talent and storylines, dealing with the venue and placing advertising, paying for or owning a ring, as well as being the owner in whole or in part of the company. As veteran wrestlers these kinds of promoters often take charge of training their crew and new aspiring talents.

Booker - Usually this will be a wrestler, referee or manager, who directs the performers in accordance to story lines *("angles")*. The booker will lay out a desired outcome as well as guide interviews and hype to heighten interest in the story lines. Depending on the style of the promotion and the experience of the crew, the booker may give intricate detailed directions to the performers. Traditionally in a professional level promotion, they will schedule the event (which match is presented when, length of segments, etc.) and give only a basic finish to the performers. Occasionally the booker may leave it up to the performers to agree on an ending which will satisfy those involved.

Venue management - in a licensed premises this will be the bar manager, in a community centre or private venue a designate, to whom the promoter or performers turn to for supplies, to verify timing of the event, etc. The venue management also may direct seating, provide security and otherwise maintain order. A venue may also hold a financial interest in a show by having paid a set fee (guarantee) to the promoter, as opposed to renting the hall to a promoter.

Referee - unlike in boxing where the referee is responsible to the authorities and enforces safety and health issues, in wrestling the referee is "part of the act". They will know the desired finish of the bout and will ensure the match ends according to the promoters' satisfaction.

Manager/Valet - A manager is a ringside role traditionally played by a wrestler, to help a performer get "heat" or audience reaction designed to heighten the drama of a bout, as well as to hype story lines in interviews and monologues. The use of female valets at ringside is a relatively new phenomenon, driven by copycatting popular TV wrestling shows, and is geared more to adding sex appeal and jealous rivalries to story lines. Occasionally these story lines will build to requiring the physical involvement of the foils.

Wrestler - An experienced trained wrestler will be able to arrive late at a show, hurriedly get their gear on, enter the ring and pull off a match without necessarily even having an exact finishing sequence described to them by a promoter or booker.

To get to that professional level, a wrestler has to learn how to "work", an art of improvisation designed to elicit responses from and in responding to an audience, that mostly involves getting the crowd to engage in the willful suspension of disbelief. This is accomplished by making the impacts seem hurtful, the competitions seem "real", the emotions seem heartfelt.

In his formative stages, a wrestler will learn the basics of holds and reversals, bumping (falling onto the mat or floor) and ring navigation techniques, industry etiquette which includes insider language and cues, and how to follow the lead of a more experienced opponent and the directions (staged or legitimate) of the referee. He will then move on to develop the style required to be effective in either of the traditional roles, that of a fan favorite *(babyface)* or of a villainous opponent (*heel*).

Traditionally, a professional match was rarely scripted move for move, as the idea was to look like the action was spontaneous and improvised ("called in the ring") and not staged. (In fact even when laid out meticulously, a physical script is almost unheard of). Another reason for this is that if the art is learned solely by sequences, when the performers mistime or forget one spot, communication problems can result in a match "falling apart", and an injury could occur. Most territories still rely on the performer being able to *work* a match rather than plan it out step-by-step. A very important part of becoming an accomplished performer is learning to call the match in the ring and to listen when their opponent is directing the pace.

At the beginning levels, the promoter or booker may lay out a match hold for hold, move for move, along with the desired ending. As wrestlers get more experience they can be granted more autonomy in developing their own style and signature sequences. During the course of a match, due to timing problems, a sense the crowd is either "with it" or "not buying the act", an injury, direction from the referee or other official at ringside, or other factor such as an opponent simply not being accomplished enough to complete the match as planned, the wrestlers may, as in football, call an audible and add, alter or eliminate certain sequences. Rarely and with only very good reason will wrestlers change the winner as decided beforehand.

Size of the industry

The professional wrestling industry in Manitoba consists of about a dozen promotion companies, ninety or so male and female wrestlers and twenty or so characters such as managers, authority figures, valets, referees and ring crew. Our estimate is that 120 individuals identify themselves as part of the industry. Additionally retired performers (est. 20) occasionally make appearances and/or consider themselves friends of the industry.

The City of Winnipeg is the busiest of all Canadian wrestling centres.

The entire province of Ontario holds about 130 domestic cards annually as well as numerous "hot" or unregulated events. Edmonton has 17, Calgary 35, the Lower Mainland of BC and Vancouver Island holds about 60. By comparison Winnipeg alone hosts up to 130 events (up to 60 in community centres), and the province of Manitoba has about 170 cards per year.

During the course of a year up to a dozen promoters in Manitoba hold events in Winnipeg and centres including Brandon, Lac Du Bonnet, Beausejour, and Reserves across Manitoba, and into Saskatchewan, Alberta and Northwestern Ontario.

Events take place in community centres, bars, legion halls, in schools, on reserves, and as add-on entertainment for hockey and baseball tournaments, etc. In some cases a group or venue may pay a guarantee and "rent" the show, or may have an arrangement with regards to revenue with the promoter.

Our review indicated approx. 20 wrestlers from BC, 20 from Alberta/Saskatchewan and 20 from Eastern Canada have performed here since deregulation, and so Winnipeg by virtue of central location and volume of events is a hub nationally for indy wrestling.

There are 3 individuals identified as experienced wrestlers actively training prospects and are referred to as trainers amongst wrestlers. At least 2 promotions conduct ongoing training of their crew directly, and 2 other promotions solicit for new trainees with no trainer or curriculum being publicly identified.

METHODOLOGY

Consultations with local industry During the course of the study the group canvassed the industry as follows.

3 Public meetings - June 24th (1), August 12 (2)
Newspaper advertisement
Internet announcements
Attended Live events in Winnipeg, Selkirk and Lac du Bonnet
Flyer handouts at live events
Email & phone calls
Performer and promoter surveys
Personal meetings and other communications with promoters and wrestlers
Venue interviews in Brandon August 27

Newspaper advertising, Internet announcements and word-of-mouth resulted in over 40 people from the industry attending a public meeting in Winnipeg June 24. This meeting was held at a venue that restricted admittance to those over age 18. At least 9 attending were past or current promoters. At that time, surveys for performers (wrestlers, managers, valets, referees) were distributed and collected. Subsequent to the meeting surveys were also distributed to wrestlers at events or mailed, with a return envelope. Two additional meetings were held on August 12th in Winnipeg attended by about 35 people.

Between June 14th - Sept. 1st there were 36 known events held in Manitoba, conducted by 9 promotions. Two identified promotions did not operate events in Manitoba during this period. The consultants attended 14 events conducted by 7 promotions, traveling to 3 different municipalities. We met with the other 2 promoters who held events that we did not attend. We also met with one of the non-operating promotions and inspected their ring and equipment. In total we had discussions and input from all but one identified promoter.

A total of 30 of the 36 events were held in Winnipeg. One promoter, a number of wrestlers and a ring are located in Selkirk. None of the industry is based in the rest of rural Manitoba.

At these live events the consultants distributed performer and promoter surveys and flyers for the public meetings, held discussions with performers and promoters in attendance, observed the event and venue operations, evaluated rings and equipment, and fielded questions about the Study.

We identified 11 different rings in use in the province and the Occupational Health specialist examined 3 rings, and viewed 2 more on videotape. (In total the group viewed 9 rings and is familiar from past experience with the other 2 which have been offered for inspection).

Consultations with government regulatory bodies Meetings were held with the Director of Workplace Safety and Health and staff; staff of the Employment Standards Branch; Director of Inspections and Licensing, Manitoba Liquor Control Commission; risk management of the City of Winnipeg; phone conversations with staff in Lac Du Bonnet, Beausejour, Selkirk, Regina, Saskatoon, the states of North Dakota and Minnesota; phone conversations with Nanaimo, Edmonton and Calgary Boxing and Wrestling Commission officials.

Industry consultations outside Manitoba Conversations and correspondence with WWE; a consultant and promoter in Ontario, a promoter in BC, wrestlers in BC and Alberta who had performed in Manitoba; a promoter in California, and a former commissioner in Oregon who had wrestled in Manitoba;

Consultations within the broader entertainment sector Meetings were held with officials of Manitoba Theatre Centre, a stunt coordinator for films and stage, a circus performer, a Fringe Festival official, and former wrestlers employed in media.

SECTION 1

Analysis of Wrestling Study data: Practices of the local industry

A.) Performer preparation, training and qualifications

Age and Health Status

Quantitative surveys returned by wrestlers indicated that performers ranged in age from 18 to 39. The average age was 24. However, study members attended 14 shows and 3 training sessions, and personally talked to or are familiar with 10 performers under the age of 18.

The vast majority of wrestlers and promoters said there were currently no age restrictions exercised for anyone to train or to wrestle on shows. The matter of age was discussed at the first public meeting. Subsequent meetings and discussions with individuals simply expanded on issues raised at that initial meeting. There was no consensus on a minimum age. Some wrestlers and promoters wanted the minimum performing age to be 18, because they felt teenagers did not have the maturity to make decisions affecting the safety of a match; others felt that teens with natural talent that showed itself in training should not be denied an opportunity to wrestle in shows. This, in turn, led to a discussion of the insurability of an incident if a minor was involved.

Promoters received qualitative surveys to use as a basis for follow up interviews and the majority were personally interviewed during the course of the study. On the subject of age, to an extent, they took a different stance than wrestlers. They were less likely to support a minimum age but felt that proper coaching would evaluate the maturity of a teenager to train or participate.

There was no current standard to assess the health of wrestlers-- through annual medicals, for example, but the majority of wrestlers seemed to be in favor of such a precaution.

None of the promoters we interviewed required an annual medical. Some felt that the training process would weed out the weak, without risking anyone's health. One promoter supported a maximum age to train, saying the risk to health was high for anyone starting wrestling in his 30's.

There was no consensus on whose responsibility it was to assess the health and maturity of wrestlers and trainees. Some said it was trainers, some said promoters and some stated that the wrestlers themselves should be held accountable.

No venue operators raised the age or health of wrestlers as an issue. The only concerns about age were about ensuring the exclusion of under-18's at licensed premises.

Drugs and Alcohol Use

Only one wrestler admitted using performance enhancing drugs such as steroids. At the first public meeting a few wrestlers acknowledged seeing or knowing of wrestlers drinking before matches and occasionally smoking marijuana. Drinking during a particular promotion's events was reported by concerned performers and observed on-site. There was consensus that this was no longer an acceptable practice and that it would stop if promoters, or even referees, made this clear to everyone in the industry.

Promoters, in private conversations, acknowledged that wrestlers sometimes drink before matches. One promoter said he specifically tells his performers that this is forbidden, but he said he had no way to enforce that rule; if he tried to suspend or fine a wrestler, the person could, and, in the past had, simply gone to another promotion.

Venue operators, if they addressed the issue at all, were firmly against any drinking or drug taking before or during the matches. They felt it was the promoter's job to make sure it doesn't happen but at least one venue was reported to honor coupons given out to performers by the promoter, prior to their bouts being completed. Although wrestling events in licensed premises take place on the assumption that the liability insurance of the premises covers the activities of the event, antics that violate The Liquor Control Act and result in an incident and litigation may invalidate the insurance paying the claim.

Skills, Preparation and Training

Based on local industry consultations, training was the single most important safety issue raised during the study.

Of the 25 wrestlers responding to the question, only 4 began training before 1996 (when wrestling was deregulated), 17 of the respondents attended wrestling school, 12 learned in a one-on-one setting, and 7 were trained "informally". Two-thirds did not receive a written curriculum or have their performance reviewed on video. After initial training, the vast majority of new skills were learned from other performers, or were self-taught, in some cases from TV. Less than half of the respondents were taught about ring construction and safety.

There is a great range in the type of training available in Manitoba. It ranges from a course that offers the basics of professional wrestling through informal sessions after the ring is set up before events, to a trainers who uses an extensive written curriculum and video review over the course of about 6 months. The cost of training ranges from $50 for a few hours of ring time (but the free labour in ring set up and tear down is assumed to count for some value) to $2500 or more for a 75-100 hour 5 week course that included mat wrestling, weight training and conditioning, nutrition, ring psychology and safety and an in-ring component.

Wrestlers that had taken or were taking serious training programs were unanimous that proper training is the keystone of safety in the professional wrestling world. They said that training had to go beyond just the physical toughening and knowledge of the routines that a wrestler needs, to include an understanding of the culture and how wrestlers interact. The latter was something only imparted through a careful training program with a veteran trainer. Much has to be learned through a slow controlled introduction onto live events. These respondents felt that poorly trained wrestlers should not be allowed to perform on shows.

The majority of wrestlers and promoters we have heard from felt that proper gear is a necessity. We heard many first hand accounts of wrestlers who were cut by footwear that were not regulation wrestling boots, that is a flat shoe without any dangerous buckles, clips, etc on the boot that could cause harm. It was also felt that proper gear is correlated with training and professionalism and showed commitment to being a serious rather than a hobby participant in the industry.

Others, newer to the business, did not put a high value on such all-around training. They were anxious to get into the ring to perform and felt that learning some basics was sufficient.

Promoters, almost all of whom were wrestlers or former wrestlers, agreed on the importance of proper training of wrestlers. Better-trained wrestlers put on better shows which meant the promoters might eventually be able to charge more for their product, they said. But many promoters acknowledged they use under-trained wrestlers on their shows.

Promoters said it was the wrestlers' responsibility to improve their skills. Two promoters said they view their operations as training grounds where younger wrestlers could learn and improve skills "on the job." Another promoter said he ran a training centre and encouraged all his wrestlers to pay fees and attend to improve their training, but that few took him up on his offer. He said he couldn't insist on only using better-trained wrestlers on his events, because his crew would, and had, rejected such pressure by going to other promotions.

Some wrestlers were of the opinion that nobody could judge their qualifications to perform as long as venues were expecting wrestling shows to compete in price and as an attraction to "extreme sports" or other entertainment that did not have any standards for training whatsoever. One such mentioned was girls boxing in bars. It was noted that those events invite untrained female patrons to don boxing gloves and engage in a real fight for prize money wrestlers considered substantial. Rock bands will rent a ring from a promoter and put on hardcore (weapons) bouts between sets. Girls mud wrestling has recently emerged in bars and there is concern about those participants entering wrestling.

Venue operators did not comment about the training of wrestlers.

Fatigue levels and recovery times

This was not an issue among any of the groups. Wrestlers do not perform often enough in Manitoba for this to be a factor on safety, according to the wrestlers and promoters that were surveyed.

B) Venues and equipment

Security and Crowd Control

Of 29 wrestlers who answered this survey question, 12 said they had performed at a venue where they had concerns for performer and audience safety. Over 50%, 15 of 28 respondents, said they were not satisfied with crowd control on cards they had performed on.

Wrestlers at the public hearings said their greatest concerns were the safety of children at ringside. They felt it was the promoter's responsibility to ensure a safety zone.

The promoters at the public hearings said they made conscious efforts to keep spectators a safe distance from the ring on their shows. They did this by using barriers, removing seats around the ring, and having their crews watch for people, especially children, who breached the safety zone. Trainees most often provided security. One promoter indicated that he has had incidents at bar shows involving fans but not at Community Centres. Due to the qualities of being family-oriented, clean and well-lit, and having proper facilities for the wrestlers, Community Centres are seen as safe and desirable venues.

Promoters were not observed at live events providing specific instructions to their security to actively control crowd movement or actions or keep aisles clear.

On site inspections and talks with venue operators indicated they depended on promoters to handle security and crowd control as it affected the wrestling shows. No staff from any venues was observed providing ringside security. One major venue said they relied on their contracted security service to monitor the events, but that venue has not hosted an event recently.

Crew Training and Qualifications

A few promoters designated ring crew chiefs-- individuals that were more experienced in putting up the ring and on what the ring should "feel" like when it was properly set up. Some promoters relied on underage teens or other trainees to provide free labour and stated that they themselves verify the ring was ready for use.

The referees were to keep an eye or more accurately, a foot on the condition of the ring platform as an event unfolded. Wrestlers were observed communicating ring conditions and issues to performers who were to follow them onstage.

Set-up, condition monitoring, and maintenance

Of 29 wrestlers who answered a survey question regarding ring set-up, 20 (67 percent) said they had performed in a ring that they considered unsafe, and 21 said they had performed in a ring that other performers considered unsafe. Yet, asked if they performed in a ring that promoters or bookers warned was unsafe, only six (20 percent) answered "yes." All but two said they inspected the ring before their performance.

Less than half (12 of 27) said their training included how to evaluate ring safety and stability.

Next to training, the issue of safety of rings garnered the most discussion at the public meetings. However despite the high number of wrestlers who said they had been in rings they considered unsafe, at the public meetings there was next to no finger-pointing or blaming anyone for the condition of those rings. Observations were more directed at how rings were set-up and monitored and whether these practices needed improvement. The most repeated story was that everyone who trains learns to set up a ring, that the lowest trainees on the pecking order are assigned the set-up duties.

During the later public meetings, the discussion turned to having the referee designated to be specifically responsible for the ongoing monitoring of ring conditions. At live events wrestlers were observed communicating ring conditions and issues to performers who were to follow them onstage.

Three promoters said they have designated ring crew chiefs, individuals experienced in setting up rings and verifying they are safe for use. Three promoters said they took direct responsibility for verifying the rings were safe for use. Site inspections and talks with other promoters indicated they use trainees, often underage wrestling trainees, for set-up duties and no protocol for ensuring ring safety. We observed no written plans for construction of the rings we saw at shows. No measuring devices were used to determine the tension on the ropes or cables. One promoter said in a sit-down interview that he had colour-coded instructions for his crew. During site visits, rings or components were observed to break or fail on 6 occasions.

Venue operators left the set-up of rings to the promoters although they expressed a concern that aisles and general access to the bar was maintained.

On-site medical services

Only 9 of 29 of respondents to the wrestler's survey said that on-site first aid or other medical services were available when they performed. Less than 25% (7 of 29) said that there was someone trained in first aid there if needed.

At the first public meeting this was not discussed as a major issue. However by the second and third meetings a consensus had developed that first aid training and presence was a good idea and discussion turned to how to pay for first aid training for at least one member of every show.

The majority of those wrestlers and promoters who spoke to the issue said they supported having referees trained in first aid, and the idea that a course should be available to all was raised. There was a consensus that trainers should be qualified in first aid as well.

Promoters at the meetings did not oppose first aid training but they were concerned over whether they would be forced to pay for it.

Venue operators did not address the issue.

Safety and Contingency Planning

The referees were expected to monitor the ring conditions by promoters. During site visits their inexperience was evident as many times the canvas was not even swept off before or between the bouts (a basic courtesy in the industry) and they did not check on or accompany wrestlers to the dressing room when the bout was concluded. Ringside security was often provided by trainees/newer wrestlers or hangers-on who were not familiar with their surroundings or were too absorbed with the bouts.

Some of the buildings came equipped with first aid kits, some did not. Some of the wrestlers were known to have First Responder training but there was no formal protocol evident for sudden incidents that might require care. In the first meeting no one really knew who had final say about safety or contingency planning, but a majority at the second and third meetings began leaning toward having a referee given the responsibility of checking that a ring is safe. In interviews some performers voiced concerns about some promoters not ensuring injured participants received medical treatment promptly, and commented on the responsibility of promoters when injuries occur.

The inability to acquire affordable liability insurance was cited by promoters and wrestlers as a threat to the future of the industry, as venues are increasingly requiring such insurance. One promoter indicated he was only able to acquire coverage with great difficulty and at a cost of $7000 per annum, which 3 years ago cost $1000. Another promoter told the consultants he had allowed events, contracted in a venue with which he held an agreement that included proof of insurance, to be operated by a different promoter who had no contract with the venue or policy of insurance. This practice of "lending" or "borrowing" another's insurance and how that may affect the validity of the policy if a claim resulted, was cited as a concern by many promoters and performers.

SECTION 2

BURDEN OF INJURY

33 Injuries resulting in 99 treatments were reported by 29 wrestlers, and there were about 30% more injuries resulting in treatments from training than from matches. Eleven emergency room visits were reported. About a dozen injuries resulted in visits to general practitioners and 6 injuries were treated through chiropractic care. Only 4 injuries were reportedly seen by orthopedic specialists.

Of those who responded to the survey, about the same number of injuries were reported from training (36) as from matches (34). Knee and shoulder injuries and bruising were most common (10 or more), followed by ankle injuries, concussions, wrist and elbow and back injuries. One skull fracture was reported. Injuries to hands, and head and eyes, emerged from matches but none were reported during training.

Our interviews gleaned some significant examples of injuries:

1) A very experienced and respected wrestler, 35, took a bad fall over the top rope and hit his head. The wrestler got a concussion, not his first, and was taken by ambulance to an emergency room. This summer he showed no ill effects or resulting nerves, and remains a star across the country.

2) An inexperienced teenage valet sustained a cervical fracture and a lumbar fracture. She was 14 at the time. She was asked by a young wrestler to practice a Mexican vaulting leap and head scissors takedown, called a Huricanrana, and the two did not execute the move safely.

3) A young wrestler in his 20's sustained a fractured cervical vertebrae in the late 1990's and retired to continue his education. He returned briefly to wrestle in 2003 but upon taking a bump reinjured his neck and has again had to leave the industry.

4) Despite all having concerns about a wrestler being under the influence, the promoter, a referee and his opponent allowed a match to continue, and upon the finishing maneuver, the wrestler suffered sufficient trauma to be taken by ambulance to an emergency room.

5) At one of the public meetings, a referee cited an incident in which a wrestler was knocked unconscious. Rather than stabilize the performer, other wrestlers and crew carried him from the ring to the dressing room and revived him.

6) A newspaper reported that a wrestler confronted a fan who poured beer onto him during a match. Security had already intervened to remove the fan, and the altercation was quickly broken up.

7) At a show held in a bar, a young performer of limited training and experience attempted a flying move off the top rope despite being instructed not to do so by an experienced performer booking the finish of the match. He landed on his head and neck, knocking himself out, and an ambulance was called to take him to the emergency room where X-rays and a Catscan were taken.

SECTION 3

ANALYSIS RELATIVE TO PROVINCIAL AND LOCAL LEGISLATION AND REGULATION

The professional wrestling industry in Manitoba has operated in a legislative vacuum since deregulation in 1996. No legislation or regulation at either the provincial or municipal levels applies directly to professional wrestling, and any peripheral laws and regulations that could be applied to wrestling have not been employed.

The Manitoba Workplace Safety and Health Act contains definitions of a "worker" and of a trainee which could bring wrestlers under the purview of subsequent sections which define the duties of employers (4(2)) and contractors (7(1)) to keep workplaces safe and of workers to take responsibility for the safety of their jobs. Under 43(1) of the Act, workers also have a right to refuse dangerous work. The definitions also include a "structure" as a workplace and includes a wrestling ring. The Director of Workplace Safety can under 40(1) designate a workplace or class of workplace at which an employer must enable the set up of a safety and health committee.

The Employment Standards Code defines a "child" as under 16 and an "adolescent" as aged 16 or 17, then requires a permit for the employment of children. The director can deny a permit if he feels safety, health or the well-being of the child is at risk.

The Liquor Control Act has no regulations affecting professional wrestling events in licensed premises other than bans on disorderly persons.

City of Winnipeg licensing regulations have 4 standard insurance-related requirements for groups or individuals who wish to rent or lease City venues, with an extra requirement for wrestling events.
In April 2002, the City added the extra requirement of a Certificate from the insurer verifying "(insured) operations to include entertainment style wrestling." When the City directly inquired about acquiring such a certificate for a promoter who had recently signed a Facilities Use Agreement, the insurer stated that the policy issued to him covered other forms of "entertainment", but not wrestling, and cancelled the policy due to a material breach. Immediately thereafter the promoter, due to not holding adequate liability insurance, ceased operating in city venues.

These affect the practices of the local industry in the following ways:

A.) Performer preparation, training and qualifications

Age and health status

No provincial or municipal laws or regulations look at the health of wrestlers before, during, or after they are in the ring. There was no indication from wrestlers, promoters or others in the industry that children under 16 currently are used in any capacity although it was done in the recent past, or that they have ever needed permits to work on shows.

Drug and alcohol use

Not even the Liquor Control Act bans the use of alcohol by performers on a wrestling show. There was no indication that anyone has ever made a Workplace Safety and Health complaint of an unsafe workplace due to use of drugs or alcohol on wrestling shows.

Preparation and training

No provincial or municipal laws or regulations govern or oversee the training, or lack thereof, for wrestlers in Manitoba.

Performance requirements relative to skill levels

No provincial or municipal laws or regulations relate to whether wrestlers or referees are qualified to do their roles on a wrestling show.

Fatigue levels and recovery times

No provincial or municipal laws or regulations deal with the recovery times or fatigue levels of professional wrestlers.

B. Venues and equipment

Security and crowd control

The Liquor Control Act sec. 96 requires licensed venues to have security measures in place to prevent disorderly conduct. But these measures are a back-up to the crowd control that venues expect to be provided by a wrestling promotion.

Crew training and qualifications

Under section 87 of the Construction Industry Safety Regulation 189/85R, an employer must ensure an experienced worker supervise erecting a temporary support system.

No other provincial or municipal laws or regulations specifically relate to crew training or qualifications.

Set-up, condition monitoring and maintenance

Under the Workplace Safety and Health Act, the Construction Industry Safety Regulation (sec. 88) requires employers to provide design drawings and other information for a Temporary Support Structure, to a health and safety officer. The design must be approved and signed by a professional engineer and the drawing shall also include exact specifications as to materials and grades of all components, load capacity, the drawing must be adhered to and must be kept at the site at all times.

On-site medical services

No provincial or municipal laws or regulations require on-site medical services or the knowledge of first aid by anyone in a professional wrestling show.

Safety and contingency planning
No provincial or municipal laws or regulations apply.

C. Event programming

-risk assessment procedures
-risk containment strategies
-contingency planning

City of Winnipeg through the Facilities Use Agreement requires promoters to hold liability insurance of $2 Million in civic venues. No other provincial or municipal laws or regulations apply.

SECTION 3 ISSUES IDENTIFICATION

- There are no laws currently enforced in the province that affect pro wrestling safety standards and practices.
- The Workplace Safety and Health Act has not been applied to the wrestling industry since 1997. Prior to that year, the Province regulated wrestling as a sport. The Act does not apply to sports, but the Department has not since deregulation contemplated their role in what wrestling truly is, sports-entertainment.
- Licensees have no expertise in conducting wrestling events and place trust in the promoters who themselves may not be aware of The Liquor Control Act regulations.
- Venue operators may not realize they can be held accountable for safety deficiencies during wrestling events. There is a perception in parts of the industry that where wrestlers are contracted or otherwise considered to be self-employed, promoters and venues are not responsible for safety standards. Under the Act, principle contractors may still be responsible for the conditions of the workplace.
- There are no regulations against wrestlers or other entertainers drinking on the job.
- One promoter allowed another promoter to operate events under his Facilities Use Agreement and insurance in a City venue, without being present to provide direct supervision or responsibility for the conduct of the matches.
- The City of Winnipeg was concerned that insurers were not being made aware that the policies of insurance being issued were to cover entertainment style wrestling.

SECTION 4

ANALYSIS RELATIVE TO NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL WRESTLING INDUSTRY

Other jurisdictions - Regulation of pro wrestling in Canada is contained in one province, and about 10 municipalities in the perceived authority of Sec. 83 of the Criminal Code to empower Boxing Commissions to oversee wrestling. Regulation in the US is similar. Some states (approx. 19) regulate wrestling through Boxing Commissions or licensing authorities and collect fees to subsidize activities. Some American cities have local regulations and Indian Reservations can determine their own rules, although our scan did not find any significant evidence that these 2 systems are impacting industry safety.

Other Provinces

Ontario

Professional wrestling in Ontario is under the control of the Ontario Athletic Commission (OAC). Ontario hosts 130 events annually, about the same as Winnipeg alone. Another estimated 40 unlicensed shows are run annually. There are about 25 licensed promoters, although not all are actively running shows.

Ontario requires $1 million third party liability insurance for shows. Only one promoter has an annual policy and about six pay up to $550 a show on a per event basis. Promoters pay $1000 security deposits against projected gate tax of 2%. Wrestlers require a licence which costs $75.

Saskatchewan

The Saskatoon and Regina Boxing and Wrestling Commissions have both been abolished since 2000. There are two promotions and about 20 wrestlers in the province, but only about 15 to 20 live shows a year. Manitoba promotions also tour Saskatchewan.

Alberta

Calgary has a Boxing and Wrestling Commission with 9 members, regulating about 35 shows a year. They do not oversee aspects of safety such as ring specifications, training qualifications or other areas considered by this study. Lethbridge has a Commission but there is not much activity. Edmonton has a more active Boxing and Wrestling Commission. The city has two promoters and about 16 shows a year. The Commission has the following basic rules.

"Part 9: Professional Wrestling

9.1 No professional wrestler shall make contact with any spectator during a contest.

9.2 The promoter of a professional wrestling show shall ensure that wrestlers do not make contact with spectators during a contest.

9.3 The promoter of a professional wrestling show shall ensure that the show is conducted safely and decently.

9.4 When it appears to him that a wrestler is not in proper physical or mental condition to participate in a contest, the Commission's representative may prohibit a wrestler from taking part in a show. "

Insurance is required in the amount of $1 Million but they are aware that this is becoming unavailable.

Licensing - promoters pay $200 per show vs. 3% of the gate but a local group can get a reduction to $100 per show if they are planning a number of consecutive shows. Wrestlers pay $30 for a licence and as there is no age restriction minors hold licences.

British Columbia

Boxing and Wrestling Commissions exists in Nanaimo, Victoria, and Prince George. Nanaimo promoters require a $5 million liability insurance policy. They are licensed for $15 a year and must pass an RCMP background check. Little activity takes place in the other two cities.

The Vancouver Athletic Commission used to regulate professional wrestling in that community but ended that oversight this year and views wrestling as an entertainment activity.

The British Columbia Liquor Control and Licensing Branch used to ban contact sports, including pro wrestling, in establishments but as of August 2003, allows "live prize-fighting, kick-boxing, and similar contact sports events on premises provided (the licensee) applies to the general manager (of the LCLB) for approval in advance, do not involve patrons, and take steps to protect both staff and patrons." Licensees must also apply to the general manager for a permanent licence change to host such events.

National/International bodies

WWE (formerly WWF)

The only major worldwide touring company in the pro wrestling industry. They refer to their product and presentation style as "sports entertainment". Their revenue in 2002-2003 was $374,264,000. Their enormous TV exposure drives many of the trends in the industry. They contract almost all established and emerging wrestlers in North America, and also fund a developmental promotion in Ohio.

Based on a year 2000 sample, talent contracts provide guidelines for performers training, match safety and augment company practices in risk management. Rings are specifically manufactured to WWE's specifications. The fact the performers wrestle each other often in the same ring (familiarity) is cited as a safe practice.

This organization promotes major events in the Manitoba market approximately 3 times per year. Some performers in Manitoba have appeared on WWF/WWE television in the past. As a touring company based in the USA, there is no real involvement of the Manitoba industry in their events, although about 6 of their current wrestlers have appeared in local industry wrestling rings since 1996. In some cases local wrestlers may be used to fill out events.

NATIONAL WRESTLING ALLIANCE (NWA)

The National Wrestling Alliance is a continent-wide organization of regional promotions in the wrestling industry. The National Wrestling Alliance, and it's precedent the National Wrestling Association was for almost 60 years the dominant organization in the wrestling industry in North America and worldwide. Upon the decline of the territorial system and the emergence of national wrestling companies, the NWA has seen membership drop from up to 35 strong regions in 1980 to about 20 members across North America and the UK, including Manitoba.

The current members are promotions like those found in Manitoba, in that only a few have TV shows or operate regularly. The NWA Board of Directors decides on various champions that members are required to contract a few times per year at a set rate.

A review of the NWA Bylaws as of Feb. 28, 2002 reveals no provisions that mandate any safety standards or affect safety. There are no requirements to qualify wrestlers or certify training; many promotions used the NWA brand to hype their own training schools. There is no NWA standard as to medical exams, equipment, rings, venue management, liability insurance or any other issue that was raised in our study.

A provision added after Feb. 2002 apparently requires that an NWA member be licensed and in good standing with their local Wrestling Commission where one exists, and adhere to the regulations set forth under those laws.

The standards and practices of NWA promotions in BC, California and Manitoba were compared for this study. The promotion in BC did not seem to operate in jurisdictions in the territory that have Commissions, while the promoter in Manitoba is licensed in Ontario where he also operates. Both heavily relied on training facilities for talent development until recently. The promotion in California sub-contracted an existing promotion to provide talent and all 3 promotions often book outside veteran talent as featured performers.

US STATE LAWS

Among the more notable laws and practices are:

ILLINOIS - 2 state legislators and the crime commissioner want to see a disclaimer precede the performances as well as before the popular wrestling shows aired on several networks. They hope Illinois can prompt a federal requirement.

The initiative was prompted by a Naperville teen that was paralyzed after another boy subjected him to a "piledriver", a hold in which a wrestler's skull is driven toward the mat with force.

LOUISIANA bans piledrivers and requires that wrestlers sign a form indemnifying the Commission.

NEBRASKA - Commission approves all time and dates and the Commissioner must approve all "weapons" for use as well as give prior approval if wrestlers plan to take the match outside of the ring.

NEVADA - in 2001 the basic cost to run a wrestling event was over $1000 a show.

NEW HAMPSHIRE requires an 18 foot ring be used and "2 or 3 inches" of padding in a single 18 foot section.

NEW JERSEY - deregulated professional wrestling in 1998 but moved to outlaw "EXTREME WRESTLING " in 2000. They defined both activities to illustrate the difference.

"n. "Wrestling" means a bona fide athletic contest in which participants struggle hand-to-hand with the object of winning by throwing an opponent or scoring points and in which any purpose of providing entertainment is secondary.

o. "Extreme wrestling" means an activity in which participants struggle hand-to-hand and cut, slash or strike each other or themselves with an implement to intentionally cause bleeding or perform any intentional act which could reasonably be expected to cause bleeding, primarily for the purpose of providing entertainment to spectators rather than conducting a bona fide athletic contest.

To further such public confidence and trust, the regulatory provisions of this act are designed to extend strict State regulation to all persons, practices and associations related to the operation of any boxing, wrestling, extreme wrestling, kick boxing or combative sports exhibition, event, performance or contest held in this State.

The Legislature further finds and declares that, because its principal purpose is to entertain without injuring or disabling one of the participants, professional wrestling should be excluded from this system of regulation and control.

C.5:2A-18.1 Ringside physicians, ambulance required."

NEW YORK - The State Assembly passed the Wrestlers Safety and Health Act on Oct 1, 2002. The State Athletic Commission requires promotions that run more than 6 times a year to have a written drug policy including printed educational material. Drug testing is not mandatory, is at the promoters expense, and no sanctions are included for a failure of a drug test. Furthermore, the bill removes licensing of participants (no more medical exams) and provides only for licensing of promoters.

NORTH CAROLINA - The N.C. Boxing Commission, which also oversees kickboxing and "toughman" events, wants to regulate pro wrestling. In South Carolina or Virginia, wrestlers must be at least 18, pass annual physicals and, like promoters, pay a fee. State agents visit matches to ensure participants and promoters are licensed and insured. Wrestlers often move among the three states, working for the two dozen promoters in each. Industry officials say there are more than 200 pro wrestlers in North Carolina, compared with 200 licensed in South Carolina this year and 1,500 in Virginia.

OREGON had the most stringent laws, requiring drug tests, defining actual fouls and requiring referees by law to enforce the Commission's edicts. WWE as a result did not operate in the State for over 10 years. Complaints that unlicensed shows outnumbered the legal ones, and the sudden demand to enforce the "rules" on a TV network-sponsored local wrestling program, resulted in an embarrassing uproar and the State reduced oversight to matters of licensing and fees in 2003.

WASHINGTON STATE licenses promoters and requires performers to be licensed and provide a medical. It has also required ambulances be present at events.

Some other authorities are located in the states of Pennsylvania, Oklahoma, Alaska, Mississippi, and Maryland, and in the cities of Mansfield, Ohio; Baker, Oregon; Cleveland, Ohio; and Washington, DC. There is no regulation regarding professional wrestling in North Dakota or Minnesota, the 2 states adjoining Manitoba.

Off-shore industry examples

Wrestling is more deeply rooted in the cultures of Japan and Mexico and the entry requirements as enacted by the promoters and wrestlers as gatekeepers/mentors are generally more onerous than in North America.

Japan: In Japan an apprenticeship-mentorship model similar to Sumo is the norm. It is normal for "young boys" (beginners) to have to do all the arduous tasks including set-up of equipment, carrying bags for the veterans and even washing the back of the owner in the baths. This is meant to instill respect for the effort and tradition that forms the foundation of the wrestling culture in Japan. The conditioning expected of prospects far exceeds that of the typical North American promotion, as illustrated by this example

In public tryouts, 200 applicants were considered and cut down to a field of 23. Then it was narrowed even more down to 6. Those 6 had to complete the following tasks to "make it": 100 Abdominal crunches, 2 rounds or 200 total, 50 leg-abdominal exercises, 100 back exercises, 2 rounds or 200 total, 30 arm & shoulder exercises 3 rounds or 300 total and 300 hindu squats. It was considered a very basic program to test the field's abilities and conditioning level. The promoter expected a good percentage of the participants would complete the program, allowing them to be trained.

Out of the final six applicants, none completed any of the tasks. In other words not one of the tasks above was completed. The applicants were vomiting and giving up prior to completing the tasks. The promoter was shocked that none of the applicants were able to pass any of the physical tests, and said the trainees' standards of physical strength has fallen and he is having a hard time finding young Japanese people who are in shape.

Mexico: Lucha Libre is as much a part of life in Mexico as hockey is in Canada. Until the crash of the peso a few years ago the country supported at least 3 major promotions in the Distro Federal (Mexico City) alone. On Sundays hundreds of cards were held and featured wrestlers would appear at 2 or 3 shows one after another. The northern states (Tijuana and Monterrey) had their own major promotions as well, and North American wrestlers would often commute from California and Texas to appear on events. One Canadian-born performer told a major magazine recently he did up to 7 shows a Sunday. Economic conditions and oversaturation of wrestling on TV led to a decline in wages and jobs.

Lucha style is right hand, rather than left hand based, and has within it set routines such as dives between the ropes, springboard dives over the ropes, and other set bits that all performers are expected to perform in almost every match. The rings were traditionally stiff ("hard as concrete"), and that meant the correct way to fall in Mexico was more of a roll and not a back bump. The deep cultural roots are such that the matches are almost always "technico vs rudo" (good guy vs bad guy or "babyface vs heel" in North American wrestling lingo). Mexican culture is reflected in rivalries that revolve around the taking of an opponents mask (mascara contra mascara), elevating to haircut matches (hermanos contra hermanos), culminating in title bouts with age-old belts at stake. These bouts require special knowledge and training as to pacing and performance. The emotional attachment of the fans often led to volatile situations and the wrestlers are taught specifically how to deal with riots, debris being tossed and fans wanting to fight (especially the white "gringo" heels).

The individual Mexican states have regulatory commissions and enforce some standards such as honoring match stipulations, styles of bouts and wrestlers' licensing and medicals. There is also a wrestlers' union that holds annual fundraising cards and has made demands upon the promoters and TV networks in the past.

Analysis of Standards and Practices

A. Performer preparation, training and qualifications

Age and health status
Edmonton licenses minors to wrestle

WWE has rarely used minors, and those were from families well-established in the industry. Some performers have been up to age 80. Wrestlers have an annual medical, which includes full blood testing. Medicals are filed as required, for licensing in a few jurisdictions.

NWA Manitoba and BC allow minors to wrestle and referee.

South Carolina and Virginia require wrestlers be 18 and pass a medical.

Washington State requires wrestlers to pass a medical.

Japan and Mexico both allow underage trainees.

Drug and alcohol use
Edmonton prohibits wrestlers who are " not in proper physical or mental condition"

WWE - Contracts state: "TALENT shall select his own foods, vitamins and other ingested items, excepting illegal and/or controlled substances and drugs, which are prohibited by COMPANY's Drug Policy." As WWE operates events more than 6 times annually in New York State they also adhere to the requirement of that state.

New York State requires companies that hold 6 or more events per year to have a printed drug policy.

Washington State requires annual drug tests as part of the medical

Preparation and training

WWE - New performers are schooled in the WWE style at their warehouse gym in Connecticut even if they are already accomplished professionals. An agreement with an Ohio group, OVW, under supervision of very respected industry figures, forms a kind of farm team for wrestlers to be developed or for injured wrestlers to recondition. Many emerging wrestlers have been signed out of a California group as well as from a competing national TV promotion.
WWE Contracts state: "TALENT shall be responsible for TALENT's own training, conditioning, and maintenance of wrestling skills and abilities...appropriate to obtaining and maintaining physical fitness for wrestling"

NWA - NWA BC has used backyarders in the past but now requires all wrestlers to be trained by a recognized program, and has booked established/veteran talent for feature bouts at times. Match content was discussed and mimed by talent with direction from promoters and bookers.

NWA California used wrestlers and trainees of an established promotion as sub-contractors and booked established/veteran talent for feature bouts. Match content was discussed and mimed at length before shows by talent under advice of promoters and bookers.

NWA Manitoba has used under-trained performers recently but also has used veteran performers as well. Matches are discussed before the events.

Japan and Mexico have long apprenticeships and physical training to prepare prospects.

Performance requirements relative to skill levels

Ontario prohibits women from wrestling men on local promotions, but allows WWE to conduct such matches based on their presumed level of professional talent and precautions.

WWE contracts state: "TALENT shall use best efforts in employing TALENT's skills and abilities as a professional TALENT and be responsible for developing and executing the various details, movements, and maneuvers required of wrestlers in a professional wrestling exhibition."

Louisiana bans piledrivers presuming the maneuver is too dangerous regardless of training.

Fatigue levels and recovery times
No information was found that impacts this area.

B. Venues and equipment

Security and crowd control
Edmonton requires that shows be run "safely and decently" i.e. -do not incite a riot.

WWE - WWE now books only major venues which monitor their own security needs. Every event has a WWE security chief assigned to ensure the safety of WWE employees.

NWA BC/NWA California/ NWA Manitoba used trainees and wrestlers for security, NWA
California also had on-site security staff.

NWA Manitoba relies on in-house security staff in bar venues.

Nebraska can refuse to license a venue site for an event. As well "the highest level of safety must be maintained by the contestants and spectators at all times."

Crew training and qualifications
WWE - To ensure rings are set up properly, only experienced technicians handle the ring and referees are part of the ring crew .

NWA BC/ NWA California both used experienced ring crews.

Set-up, condition monitoring and maintenance
WWE declined to allow examination of their rings as those are manufactured to WWE's specifications and are proprietary information. Referees and ringside officials monitor conditions.

NWA BC/ NWA California each used rings supplied by associated promoters, both had a producer or official at ringside during events and referees were to be aware of conditions.

NWA Manitoba promoter supervises and tests his ring before use and attends at ringside. He has also used another promoter's ring.

New Hampshire requires 18 ft. rings that have 4 ropes at a set distances from each other.

On-site medical services

WWE - touring groups have their own trainer to treat injuries. A Doctor attends all TV events.

NWA BC had performers on shows qualified in First Aid and carries a kit.

NWA California had staff with First Aid and a kit on-site.

NWA Manitoba relies on the facility having a first aid kit.

New Jersey requires a ringside physician at Extreme wrestling events.

Safety and contingency planning

WWE on tour meets all standards set out by venues or regulatory bodies for ambulances, EMT's etc. and touring security chiefs review venue layouts during set-up

New Jersey requires an ambulance on-site of Extreme wrestling events

Washington State requires an ambulance at wrestling events

C. Event programming

Risk assessment procedures

Promoters are licensed in Edmonton, Nanaimo, Victoria, Calgary and Ontario.

WWE - An entire department is dedicated to risk management and event operations. The company employs a stunt coordinator. Very experienced agents (retired wrestlers) go through the desired presentation of the bouts with the participants.

Talent contracts state: "TALENT shall take such precautions as are appropriate to avoid any unreasonable risk of injury to other wrestlers in any and all Events. These precautions shall include, without limitation, pre-match review of all wrestling moves and maneuvers with wrestling partners and opponents; and pre-match demonstration and/or practice with wrestling partners and opponents to insure familiarity with anticipated wrestling moves and maneuvers during a wrestling match."

Risk containment strategies

Edmonton prohibits wrestlers from engaging fans and makes the promoter responsible for this as well.

WWE - There is an emergency response protocol. In the past five years WWE has seen one in-ring death from a failed stunt and one instance of paraplegia from an errant slam. If a performer gets hurt, the referee, who wears an earpiece to get cues from the production staff, signals "X" and EMT's immediately respond.

Talent contracts state: "In the event of injury to TALENT, and/or TALENT's partners and opponents during a wrestling match, TALENT shall immediately signal partner, opponent and/or referees that it is time for the match to end; and TALENT shall finish the match forthwith so as to avoid aggravation of such injury."

Nebraska must approve all weapons and plans to wrestle outside the ring

New Jersey tightly regulates Extreme wrestling

Contingency planning

Ontario and Edmonton require $1 million third party liability insurance, Nanaimo $5 million

WWE - carries full third party liability coverage as required by venues.

The City of Winnipeg requires $2 Million liability policy to operate in civic venues
NWA Manitoba carries a $2 million liability policy.

SECTION 4 ISSUES IDENTIFICATION

- Despite exercising the authority to regulate wrestling, Canadian jurisdictions that do so have no rules addressing the training of wrestlers or their actual qualifications to be licensed.
- No jurisdiction addresses safe ring specifications, maintenance, or other aspects that truly impact on safety as determined by our study.
- There are no standards for on-site or emergency medical services or response protocols.
- Other jurisdictions have expressed concern about untrained thrill seekers who engage in backyard wrestling and may enter professional wrestling unchecked.
- Extreme wrestling and its emphasis on dangerous stunts are also cited as infiltrating performance wrestling and heightening the danger to wrestlers.
- Wrestling culture internationally relies on the mentorship of newer performers by experienced veteran wrestlers to impart a knowledge and respect for safe practices.
- The more professional and profitable a wrestling promotion is, the greater the emphasis and spending on safety. This applies to every stage from training to live event performance.

Comparison to Manitoba

The national/international wrestling industry generally has more policies and protocols in place than exist in Manitoba:

Performer preparation, training and qualifications With one exception, regulated jurisdictions surveyed do not allow the licensing of minors. Many require annual medical exams. Promotions elsewhere exercise judgement on using underage performers and requiring medical exams. Policies to monitor drug and alcohol are in some use elsewhere. No jurisdictions have any regulation about training or qualifications, but some still make determinations about match content (safety). Promotions rely on the industry-based experience of promoters or bookers to determine if a wrestler is properly qualified. Use of untrained backyarders is discouraged by many promotions. (Fatigue levels and recovery times are a non-issue.)

Venues and equipment : Crowd control, standards for crew training, ring specifications or maintenance, on-site medical or safety contingency plans.

Event programming : promoter licensing or responsibility for risk assessment and stunt preparation, talent responsibility for match conduct, monitoring of an injury or emergency response, Extreme wrestling, or requirements for Third party Liability Insurance

SECTION 5

ANALYSIS RELATIVE TO BROADER ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY

Given the emphasis on the physical aspect of professional wrestling, it's easy to overlook the theatrical elements that give the art its structure. With this in mind, the study examined other branches of the entertainment industry as to how they manage high-risk activities within their crafts.

Stuntmen

The study interviewed Manitoba's most experienced stunt coordinator, whose work spans both motion pictures and the stage. The stuntman fraternity is a close parallel to the wrestling world.

New members bring with them certain skills (driving, diving, fencing) which are honed and enhanced for the movies or stage by more senior stuntmen. Ongoing courses in stunt disciplines are available. Beginners work under the supervision of others until their mentors feel they are ready to undertake progressively more dangerous stunts on their own.

The most significant aspect of the stunt world is the existence of strong safety culture that's drilled into every member. Film Productions cost so much that any delay is to be avoided. Stuntmen are meticulous in avoiding accidents which could result in injury and a costly insurance claim on top of the lost filming time.

Theatre---Manitoba Theatre Centre

The requirement of wrestlers to portray different characters in their careers makes them actors of a sort. And stage actors are often required to engage in various rough and tumble physical activity as called for by their roles. The consultants looked at how the theatre protects its actors.

MTC tailors its stage stunts around the actor in a role. The stunts are designed by a trained stunt coordinator who adapts the stunts to the ability of the actor. Stunts beyond the actor's capability are performed by professional stuntmen. At all times the theatre is mindful that it's the actor, not the stunts, that makes the play, and the actor must be healthy and available for 29 performances a month.

The circus

A circus passing through Winnipeg said the only oversight into safety was an annual checking of the rigging, done at home office. We took note of a development within the EU that ordered performers in London, England to don protective headgear if they were to be at a height greater than a stepladder (such as trapeze artists). This rule was developed due to pressure from insurance companies.

Relative Analysis of:

A) Performer preparation, training and qualifications

Age and health status

Ability is more of a factor than age in the world of stuntmen. Because there are few openings for newcomers and the experience that's necessary to start takes years to acquire, it's unlikely that anyone under 18 would be accepted. Casting agents have no problem identifying an available experienced stunt professional in any size or shape who is of legal age.

Health concerns are not an issue with stuntmen. It is assumed that performers are fit and healthy enough to do what is required and if not they decline to do a stunt. The culture of safety would not allow corners to be cut in this respect.

Drug and alcohol use

The use of illegal drugs or alcohol by working performers is prohibited by the stunt community, the theatre community, and the circus.

Preparation and training

Stuntmen work under a mentor or supervisor at all times. Actors work under a stunt coordinator and director or assistant director, and are not allowed to take risks they're not fully competent to master.

Performance requirements relative to skill levels

Stuntmen are constantly being monitored and evaluated by those more senior and experienced. They are allowed to take on more risky maneuvers only when those ahead of them believe they are ready. A growing concern is that independent filmmakers sometimes hire newcomers because they will work cheaper than the unionized, experienced stunt crews, and because they will often do riskier stunts than experienced stuntmen would undertake in order to "prove" themselves.

Fatigue levels and recovery times

The safety culture in the stuntman community ensures performers are mentally and physically ready to safely complete the risks they are paid to take.

B. Venues and equipment

Security and crowd control

The safety culture that stuntmen live by makes security and crowd control a priority. An injury to a bystander would create as many problems for a film production as would an injury to a stuntman.

Crew training and qualifications
Training for stuntmen is extensive just to enter the community. It is bolstered by the constant supervision by the experienced over the newcomers.

Set-up, condition monitoring and maintenance
The safety culture of stuntmen makes set-up and monitoring a priority. The involvement of the production crew also provides a layer of protection as scenes unfold.

On-site medical services
The high-risk nature of what stuntmen do makes on-site medical services a priority as well. Stuntmen themselves have first aid training.

Safety and contingency planning
Stuntmen are extremely detailed when planning a stunt. Every eventuality is run through to prevent an accident.

C. Event programming

Risk assessment procedures
Stunts are carefully scripted and planned. Insurance companies review all stunts with the stunt coordinator and must be satisfied they are safe.

Risk containment strategies/contingency planning
Film companies carry liability insurance and also post bonds with the performers union. Procedures on treating injury at the scene and getting the injured to a hospital as soon as possible are in place.

Stunt coordinators are specialists in these fields. It is their job to avoid accidents. To do this they do everything they can to assess risk and perform the stunt while minimizing the risk of something going wrong. If there is an accident they take responsibility in any enquiry by the insurance company or officials.

SECTION 5 ISSUES IDENTIFICATION

- Stunt performers have a highly developed culture of safety that is self-regulating and works in conjunction with directors, producers and insurance companies to reduce risk to a minimal level.
- The training level and skill development of newcomers is left to the judgement of senior experienced stunt coordinators so that actors or others will not be scripted beyond their capabilities.
- There are concerns about some smaller filmmakers hiring stuntmen from outside

the traditional training culture, that will do more risky stunts for less money than highly trained, unionized stuntmen.

- In theatre, the actor is always protected from risk. This is because actors are valued in productions and are not considered interchangeable or disposable.

-Safety in the arts is most effective when internally motivated.

Comparison to Manitoba

The Manitoba wrestling industry as a whole, has few effective policies or protocols in comparison to the broader entertainment industry in relation to:

Performer preparation, training and qualifications : the development and maintaining of a safety culture through a mentorship/apprenticeship model (that controls entry into the industry including age and health considerations), preparation and training, discouraging alcohol or drug intoxication, providing experienced supervision (direction) and not cutting corners.

Venues and equipment: Security and crowd control, crew training, set up, maintenance and monitoring, on-site medical and safety and contingency planning.

Event programming : Stunt planning and review by experienced coordinators and production staff, and the presence of Liability Insurance as a monitor of, and driver for, safe practices.

SECTION 6

Summary of Findings

General observations

In public meetings, survey responses and private interviews and discussions, the pro wrestling industry in Manitoba has identified a number of serious concerns about issues which are affecting the safety of performers, fans, and venues, and have offered perspective on causes and possible solutions.

Pro wrestling is like all stunt work; laden with risk that can never be completely eliminated. The traditional goal of minimizing risk has eroded in Manitoba since deregulation.

Anyone in Manitoba can buy or rent an existing ring or get one built locally, and put on a show. Out-of province promoters occasionally venture into rural areas as well. The demand for talent to fill cards resulted in a rash of training programs. Since new wrestlers were already being featured on events, they were deemed qualified and further training was an afterthought or neglected completely.

Those promoters who have tried to maintain higher standards have been forced to share in the same inadequately trained talent pool, which has diluted their safe conduct of matches. It is felt that the issue of insurance and liability may be resulting in some experienced performers making decisions declining certain stunts, which others who cannot evaluate the risks properly are eager to attempt to gain acceptance with promoters.

In some cases backyard wrestling shows have become a feeder system for promoters trying to find new performers. The lack of experienced wrestlers and promoters meant there was no real guidance for the newcomers who continued teaching each other unsafe attitudes and habits. Promoters are challenged to maintain standards as wrestling talent may jump to other promoters who make fewer demands.

This race to the bottom in skills has been recognized by the insurance industry which has almost completely stopped covering wrestling shows. No insurance means promoters cannot book shows at safe venues such as community centres, so they have turned to bars. Licensees have no expertise in conducting wrestling events and place trust in the promoters who themselves may not be aware of the requirements of The Liquor Control Act.

The bar industry is itself desperate to find new ways of filling their venues at minimal cost, fearing the continuing impact of tougher drinking and driving laws and of the new anti-smoking bylaws. Licensed premises welcome the wider range of potential entertainment, but their lack of experience with wrestling only works to further lower standards.

Professional wrestlers and promoters are forced to compete for bookings with a variety of "extreme sports".

Extreme wrestling is now being conducted in bars and wrestlers are placed at greater risk, as the matches in that style are wilder by definition, and there are already no adequate safety standards and practices in place. The venues may be of the view that promoters of these events are mindful of performer and patron safety, and that their insurance carrier will agree to honour a claim if one results.

Solutions will generally not be found in the standards and practices of regulated jurisdictions. For example, no regulated jurisdiction in our scan has any real safety guidelines for rings. Several jurisdictions have their own concerns about their capacity to evaluate ring safety and the adequacy of wrestler training.

The safety culture of stuntmen and the mentorship/apprenticeship model closely resembles that previously common in wrestling prior to deregulation. In terms of performer mentality and risk the professions are similar and the reliance of stuntmen on insurance liability is an aspect that could be adapted to wrestling.

Detailed observations.

1) Do current safety standards and practices within Manitoba's pro wrestling industry comply with provincial legislation and regulations, and with local government by-laws?

There are provisions in the Workplace Safety and Health Act that could be applied to enforce standards in the areas of ring safety, structure and stability, and in reinforcing awareness of the greater responsibility of all participants.

Recently promoters have largely discontinued the use of children in events but none had acquired a permit for their participation previously. There is evidence of drinking contests at events, of breaking glass being used as a prop, and of unsafe rings in use. These practices may be in violation of Provincial regulations.

2) How do current safety standards and practices in Manitoba pro wrestling compare to safety standards and practices in the pro wrestling industry as a whole in North America?

In many instances the situation in Manitoba mirrors the decline of the industry but the pace has accelerated here.

The in-ring experience relied on by larger scale local promotions to evaluate risk and guide performances, has eroded due to disillusioned veterans leaving as described earlier, the entry of inexperienced promoters and performers, and competition between so many promotions.

The competition in Manitoba has resulted in more rings per capita than in other major centres. We saw and heard about problems with local rings, and it is noted that where standards for rings exist elsewhere they are often based on cosmetic issues or boxing standards.

3) How do current safety standards and practices in Manitoba pro wrestling compare to safety standards and practices in the broader entertainment industry?

The belief that modern day pro wrestling should be treated or regulated "just like theatre" is not borne out by our comparison. Both the stunt and theatre industries have experienced personnel with structured responsibilities and they are driven by the sense of having something to lose if an insurance claim results from an incident. Mentorship is a strong component in the safety culture of stunt performers which includes comprehensive training and ongoing skill development. These aspects are generally lacking in Manitoba.

Actors are protected from risk but in Manitoba pro wrestling, the attitude often is that wrestlers are replaceable, and wrestlers themselves, especially newer ones, expressed concern of retribution if they refused to do matches that emphasize extreme stunts rather than traditional wrestling holds.

RECOMMENDATIONS

What steps, if any, should be taken, and by whom, to improve safety standards and practices within Manitoba's pro wrestling industry?

In regards to Self-regulation, we recommend:

Safety and Standards Council to be established

# 1. The Province should immediately call for industry volunteers, that government can assist, to establish an interim safety council for a transition period of not more than 12 months. That group should develop a process that will lead to a democratically elected wrestling industry Safety and Standards Council.

An elected safety and standards council can act as a self-regulating body to maintain safety standards backed up by minimal provincial rules and regulations. Once safe standards are in place, we expect affordable liability insurance to become available once again. The insurance would open the way to more wrestling again being welcomed in the City of Winnipeg and other venues. Bars would not be able to hire operators who couldn't qualify for insurance, and other forms of wrestling such as backyard and Extreme would be driven to the margins, leaving the field to a renewed, viable industry.

A sizeable number of promoters and performers, including many veteran performers, have voiced their support of some form of this concept. No credible alternative has been identified and a return to a boxing-type authority would be rejected by the industry.

This recommendation is in accordance with the direction in the Terms of Reference as follows: In Manitoba, no formal industry association or professional association currently exists to monitor safety standards and practices within professional wrestling or to hold the industry accountable for adherence to generally accepted standards and practices of safety. In addition to, or as part of, other deliverables, the study being undertaken by the Government of Manitoba is expected to bring forward recommendations to help the industry address this gap.

# 2 The Council should include democratic and open elections and be representative of promoters, wrestlers and other performers and crew. The Council should also include some representation by individuals knowledgeable in the industry who do not have a vested interest, such as retired wrestlers and promoters, or other parties with expertise and experience in wrestling safety.

# 3 By virtue of the recognition granted by the Province to the Council, that body can be responsible for the conduct of the industry and file complaints to authorities if unsafe rings, equipment or uncertified performers are used.

Operation of Council

# 4 The Council can assume responsibility for ensuring all industry events adhere to safe practices by developing a checklist of event operations, requiring promoter and performer licensing, establishing ring standards, and accrediting trainers and training programs.

We recommend the following guidelines:

The **checklist** should be completed and signed by the promoter, and filed with the Council and venue. It should include warranting that the ring meets standards (see appendix) and is set up properly; that all equipment is safe and approved for its use; that performers are properly trained and fit to perform: that First Aid and First Responder are on-site; that Third Party Liability Insurance is in place supported by a Certificate verifying that entertainment style wrestling is knowingly being insured; that the venue is being operated safely with proper consideration for keeping fire exits clear; and that the promoter takes responsibility to cooperate with any provincial or municipal inspector, law enforcement officer, or agent of the venue.

*This recommendation is in general supported by The Workplace Safety and Health Act sec. 4.2 (a)-(g) "Further duties of employer",
by the Construction Trades Safety Regulation 189/85R Sec 87(a) "Employer to instruct workers": only a worker experienced in the construction of temporary support systems shall supervise the construction, use, erection maintenance and dismantling of...
and Sec. 88.4 "Employer to construct in accordance with design".

Promoters should be certified by the Council upon payment of a fee, passing a background check and will belong to a specific Safety Council sub-committee of all promoters, to help better establish and monitor emerging safety standards and practices.

All post-1996 Manitoba wrestlers currently active, that is those who entered the industry after withdrawal of MBWC licensing (estimated Oct 21, 1996), should be certified by the Council upon meeting criteria which include a) providing a medical certificate, b) payment of a fee and c) a reference from their trainer or persons recognized by the Council in talent evaluation, or they can be directed appear for an audition before a committee of the Council.

All pre-1997 Manitoba performers, who entered the industry prior to deregulation, upon meeting the criteria a) and b), and other criteria as decided, could in effect, "renew" their old MBWC licence by transferring it to a certification from the Safety Council.

All out-of province wrestlers and performers should be certified before being allowed to perform in Manitoba. Upon meeting the criteria, applicants could be certified by the Council , taking into account the applicant's established reputation, video review and/or audition when practical.

Trainers should pass a First Responder course and provide a First Aid kit on-site, adhere to the training guideline herein attached, and demonstrate ability in coaching, understanding of industry protocol and safe in-ring wrestling practice, to be certified by the council.

The course curriculum (see appendix) should include written material, video review of trainee performance and progress, ring technology, safe ring practices, proper gear, live event orientation of 100 hours, and preparation for a professional career in the industry. We estimate such professional training to be of approx. 300 hours duration.

This model can be explained as follows: *"When you are training you are the responsibility of your trainer. The trainer is responsible to the Council that accredits him. Upon certification as a performer the promoter who employs the new wrestler is responsible for his safety. (In order to train or wrestle you should provide a medical certificate, renewable annually, to be filed with the Council.)"*

Trainees who wish to be certified for the first time should appear before the Council with their trainer and upon payment of a fee (as their medical is already on file) pass an audition and/or interview as decided by the Council which may determine a system of graduated introduction onto industry events.

All applicants for **referee** should have First Responder training. If a temporary certificate is required, i.e.- a "special referee", the Council should establish a protocol to allow such activity as long as a certified referee is at ringside.

The Council should determine certification standards for other performers such as **managers and valets,** and can establish standards for ring barriers and other venue issues.

# 5 The Council should negotiate an out-of-province fee with other operators or national touring groups not located in Manitoba, who upon meeting the basic standard set-out for rings, holding adequate Liability Insurance, and adhering to the event safety checklist procedure, can have their events and performers certified safe by the Council.

# 6 The Council can coordinate the offering of courses for members or applicants in First Responder/ First Aid, wrestling promotion, venue and risk management, wrestling or refereeing clinics, etc. in the interest of promoting safety and professionalism in the industry, and can choose to make specific courses mandatory if it sees fit.

Industry practices in the transition period

# 7 The Interim Council should adopt the recommendations for ring standards, pending an elected Council which will thereafter determine future standards and practices of the wrestling industry.

# 8 Wrestling Promoters should receive a proper permit for any child under 16 to work in any capacity in the operation of a wrestling event.

This recommendation is supported by the Workplace Safety and Health Act definition of a "worker" as including (a) any person who is employed by an employer to perform a service
whether for gain or reward, or hope of gain or reward; and (c) any person undergoing training or serving an apprenticeship at an educational institution or at any other place.

This recommendation is also supported by the Employment Standards Code Sec. 83(2): "Employment of individual under 16"- Subject to this section, no person shall employ a child without a permit obtained, on application, from the director and except in accordance with the permit;
and Sec. 83(3): " Certain employment of children prohibited"- The director shall not issue a permit under subsection (2) to allow a child to work in a business if, in his opinion, the safety, health or well-being of the child is likely to be adversely affected.

# 9 Wrestlers and referees should not participate in events with children and minors, until proof is furnished that the Liability Insurance in effect knowingly covers the actions of children and minors in performance style wrestling events. The interim Council should develop and promote a general practice of keeping those under 18 off of live performances and out of locker rooms.

# 10 Promoters should ensure that referees and/or 2 parties on their crew have First Responder certification, and that First Aid is on-site, and provide such proof to the venue.

# 11 Promoters should adopt a safety checklist including an emergency protocol, review and commit to monitor venue security, meet ring standards as recommended, and file the checklist with the Director of Workplace Safety and with the venue.

This recommendation is supported by the Act Sec. 12 (a)"Duties of director of division" - The director of the division shall, in accordance with the objects and purposes of this Act, be concerned with workplace safety and health generally, and with the maintenance of

> reasonable standards for the protection of the safety and health of workers and self-employed persons in Manitoba"

# 12 In the event of a serious injury, including emergency room visit or a participant being knocked unconscious, the referee should file an injury report to be attached to the promoter's safety checklist, and to be filed with an elected Council after it is formed

This recommendation is supported by the Act Sec. 12(e) (the director of the division shall) prepare and maintain or cause to be prepared and maintained illness, death and accident statistics relating to workers and self-employed persons, and do so either alone or in conjunction with The Workers Compensation Board, the Department of Health, or any other department, agency or commission;

# 13 Until the formation of the elected Council, all venues, particularly bars, should furnish a Certificate that their Liability Insurance knowingly covers performance style wrestling, so that performers have proof they are protected.

Rings

# 14 Our recommendations for rings are based on the definition of a "workplace" from the Act as including "any structure... whether indoors or outdoors, in which one or more workers or self-employed persons, are engaged in work or have worked".

14.1 Wrestling rings should be manufactured by a reputable wrestling ring constructor; or have a professional engineer's certification on its design that is appropriate for its use; or be manufactured to the exact specifications of an official blueprint from a recognized firm, that warrants that it is appropriate for its intended use.

The standards should include ringposts and corner ropes being in vertical alignment; platform should be evenly and fully padded to about 1", and the surface should be clean and sanitary, and free of raised seams causing an obstruction to footing; ring ropes should be properly padded and wrapped with non-rotating sleeves; all corners should have adequate protective padding; all turnbuckles and the top of the ring posts should be adequately padded; all bolts and pins in place and tightened properly; proper rigging hardware and components; no protuberances on the ring posts that may injure performers;

14.2 There should be complete documentation accompanying the ring that shows the correct method and sequence for assembling the ring. Attached thereto should be a repair log so that attention can be paid to the integrity of recent repairs and welds.

These recommendations are supported by the Construction Industry Safety Regulation 189/85R sec. 87 and 88.2 and 88.3 (a)-(d).

14.3 That the promoter be responsible to warrant that the ring is safe to use after set-up, as indicated on a safety checklist.

14.4 There should be a buffer zone of 6 feet distance from ringside and the audience, with barriers appropriate for the demographics of the audience (on sides adjacent to the audience).

14.5 Cages and other devices affixed to the ring should have an engineer's certification that it is appropriate for its intended use and properly equipped with hardware to secure said cage or device.

Role of the Provincial government

# 15 The Province should provide assistance to the concerned wrestling industry members to help form an interim Safety and Standards Council, and should, through the Department of Labour or other body, provide supervision in the organization and conduct of democratic elections within 12 months.

This recommendation is supported by the Workplace Safety and Health Act sec. 13: "The director, through the division, may, in accordance with the objects and purposes of this Act,
(a) provide assistance to persons concerned with safety and health in the workplace, and provide services to assist workplace safety and health committees, employers and workers in maintaining reasonable standards for the protection of the safety and health of workers;"

# 16 If the Province, Minister of Culture, Minister of Labour, or Director of the Workplace Safety division, upon notification from concerned workers or promoters, determines that pre-existing industry disputes will prevent the formation of a democratic, representative and effective Manitoba Wrestling Safety and Standards Council, the Director of Workplace Safety should, under the Act sec. 40.1 ("Every employer shall establish a workplace safety and health committee"), ensure such is done, as provided in 40.1(b) ("for any other individual workplace or class of workplace designated by written order of the director.")

# 17 Until formation of the elected Council, the Director of Workplace Safety should take steps to ensure that the practices as described in recommendations # 10 and #11 be commenced.

This recommendation is supported by the Act Sec. 12 (a) and (e).

# 18 Upon formation of the elected Council, the Province should provide the Council with funding for per diems, supplies, seminars, classes and safety related

courses and materials, for a period of 5 years.

This recommendation is supported by the Act sec. 13: (The director, through the division, may)...(c) encourage, develop and conduct, either alone or in co-operation with organizations concerned with the purposes of this Act, education and information programs for promoting the safety and health of workers and for improving the qualifications of persons concerned with workplace safety and health;
(d) make recommendations to the minister regarding grants of moneys for any of the purposes referred to in this section;

# 19 The Manitoba Liquor Control Commission should circulate relevant material from this report and the recommendations, among licensees as information, so the licensees understand the complexity of the issues they are liable for when hosting professional wrestling events

# 20 The Province should share the study findings with the Federal government as it relates to the state of safety within the domestic pro wrestling industry.

# 21 The Province of Manitoba should work with the Federal Government and other governments, to eliminate the possibility of Section 83 of the Criminal Code being a basis for wrestling regulation, and to further resolve the patchwork quilt of regulation which results in inconsistent safety practices being imported and exported between provinces.

# 22 The Province should participate in any further regional or national industry studies of wrestling safety issues that may occur, to assist the development of interprovincial and national wrestling safety standards and practices.

# 23 The Province should assist the wrestling industry in establishing a dialogue with the insurance industry to begin the process of effecting an understanding of what risk management in pro wrestling means, and of easing the availability and cost of liability insurance to promoters that demonstrate safe standards and practices as outlined in this report.

Role of local government jurisdictions

# 24 Wrestling promoters should be required to get a municipal business license (in most cases this means from the City of Winnipeg) in their home community, and in any community in which they operate, if applicable. A condition of license should be that a Promoter acquires a policy of Third Party Liability Insurance or be part of a group that is insured, and evidence by way of a certificate that performance-style wrestling is being insured under that promoter's care and control, should be provided.

Municipal officials should ensure that wrestling promoters obtain a business license similar in nature to that of a circus, entertainment promoter, or other class from the entertainment sector.

# 25 Municipalities may evaluate a ring erected in a municipality in comparison to our recommended standards and the requirements of The Construction Industry Safety regulation, and may order a substandard ring disassembled as an unsafe structure, if an approved design drawing and certificate of a professional engineer is not provided, or if it is not equipped according to Recommendation 14.1 -14.5

# 26 Municipalities should take action to prevent backyard wrestling from charging admission, soliciting for audiences, using weapons/props of any sort, or using homemade or rented rings. These activities elevate backyard operations into the realm of a professional activity which requires safe practices and standards.

General

# 27 Any provincial, municipal or industry actions with regards to safety standards and practices, should consider and be required of all facets of the local industry - promoters, wrestlers, trainers and venue operators, whether the wrestling promotion or event is operated as a for-profit, non-profit, sole-proprietorship, partnership, co-op, community service, charity, workshop or in any other manner.

Closing comments

In presenting the above recommendations, the consultants acknowledge that the wrestling industry in Manitoba cannot turn back the clock. The new generation of wrestlers - men and women - have not been immersed in the traditional wrestling culture with its own code of conduct. Nonetheless, there are enough veterans still in the province to mirror the old standards and their expertise can be called on to restore safe practices to professional wrestling in Manitoba.

We are encouraged that three other jurisdictions have expressed an interest in the development of a structure for industry self-regulation in Manitoba, that may in turn help standardize industry safety across Canada.

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Appendix "A" - Surveys and survey results

BURDEN OF INJURY SURVEY RESULTS

Injury type and sustained		During Training	During Match	
Ankle		3	0	
	Broken	1	1	
	Twisted	0	1	
	Fractured	0	1	
Total		**4**	**3**	**Combined 7**
Knee		4	3	
	Bruised	0	1	
	Hyperextension	0	1	
	Sprained	1	0	
	Tears	1	0	
	Dislocation	0	1	
Total		**6**	**6**	**Combined 12**
Back		2	0	
	Disc Hernia	0	1	
	Muscle Pull	1	0	
Total		**3**	**1**	**Combined 4**
Shoulder		2	1	
	Tears	1	0	
	Pinched	1	0	
	Sprained	1	0	
	Ligaments	1	1	
	Separated	0	3	
	Dislocated	1	0	
Total		**7**	**5**	**Combined 12**
Wrist		1	0	
	Sprained	2	0	
Total		**3**	**0**	**Combined 3**
Elbow		2	0	
	Hyperextension	1	0	
Total		**3**	**0**	**Combined 3**
Misc.				

Bruises	5	5	
Stingers	0	1	
Concussion	3	3	
Gashed Head/face	1	1	
Fractured Skull	0	1	
Fractured Sacrum	0	1	
Dislocated Finger	0	1	
Dislocated Hand	0	1	
Broken Hand	0	1	
Black Eyes	0	1	
Bloody Eyes	0	1	
Neck	1	0	
Hip	1	0	
"Torn Ligaments"	1	0	
"Hyperextension"	1	0	
"Countless"	0	1	
Total	**13**	**18**	**Combined 31**

Total Injuries During Training **39** **in Matches** **33** **TOTAL** **72**

TREATMENT RECEIVED

Wrestler Injuries	**in Training**	**# of Treatments**	**in Matches**	**# of Treatments**
ER	5	6	6	11
Orthopedic	3	6	1	1
GP	8	11	4	5
CHIRO	4	38	2	21

Injured: from training **20** **from matches** **13**
Treatments: from training **61** **from matches** **38**

Combined Injuries from Training and Matches: trtmnt **33**
Combined Treatments from Injuries **99**

20/39 Training injuries required treatment
13/33 match injuries required treatment
33/72 total injuries required treatment

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1. Personal information

1a. Age 18 - 39 years.
Avg 24.5 years

2. Performing

a: How long have you been performing as a wrestler

Range	0.5 - 13.5 years.
Avg	4.5 years

aa: Number of Cards participated on

Range	5 - 900
Avg	187

b: Wrestler's First Matches

Year	#
89	2
90	2
91	0
92	0
93	0
94	0
95	1
96	0
97	1
98	1
99	5
00	4
01	2
02	4
03	2

bb: Where was your first match?

Chalmers C.C.	7
Norquay C.C.	3
Selkirk, MB	2
WPG	2
Le Rendezvous	2
Other	12

c: What was the date of your most recent match?

Less than 30 Days	20
Between 30 and 60 Days	2
Sometime During 2003	1
Unknown	5

d: How Many Cards do you appear on average per year

Range:	5-125
Avg	61

e: How many cards have you appeared on in 2002:

Range:	0-150
Avg	50

g: What is the shortest time between cards that you have appeared on?

One day or less	14
Less than one week	9
More than one month	1
Unknown	5
Range	2 hours ->1 Month

h: What is the longest time between cards that you have appeared?

Less than one month	7
Less than three months	12
Less than 6 months	4
Less than 1 year	1
Unknown	3
Range	7 Days - 7 Months

i: Where have you performed on wrestling cards?

Manitoba/Sask	28
Ontario	15
Alberta	5
Maritimes	4
Quebec	1
B.C.	1
Yukon / NWT	0
U.S.A.	1

j: Where do you perform most often?

Manitoba	28
Ontario	1

3. Training and Skill Development

	a: Began Training	b: Finished Training
88	2	1
89	1	0
90	0	0
91	0	1
92	0	0
93	0	0
94	0	0
95	1	0
96	0	0
97	1	0
98	1	0
99	4	3
00	6	1
01	5	1
02	4	3
03	0	1
Still	N/A	2

c: What type of training have you received:

Wrestling school:	18
One-on-One:	14
Informal:	7

e: What on site first-aid / medical training available?:

None	14
First-Aid Kit	2
Trainer	5
Poster	1
Ice	1
Unknown	5

f: Was there written guide / video or curriculum?:

Yes	8
No	19
?	1

g: Did the training include a video review of your performance?:

Yes	9
No	17
?	1

h: Did the training include a guide to evaluate ring safety and stability?

Yes	12
No	15
?	1

i: After initial training, where do you learn or acquire new skills / moves?

Self-Taught	10
With Other Performers	27
From Promoters	2
From TV	5
Unknown	1

j: How much training and preparation do you do each month for wrestling?:

	Cardiovascular	Weights	In-Ring
0-5 hours	7	5	9
5-10 hours	3	1	1
10-20 hours	2	7	9
20-40 hours	8	8	3
Unknown	8	7	6
Low	0	1	0
High	40	48	80
Avg	15.5	20	20.5

k. Do you use performance enhancing drugs?

Only one person admitted using any performance enhancing drugs and the person admitted to all the listed categories: alcohol, steroids, pain reduction and other

Appendix "B" - List of interviews

Contacts list (personal discussions or phone)

Wrestling industry -
Promoters/Trainers/Advisors/Bookers = 23 individuals, 3 municipalities
Performers and retired performers = 74 individuals, 3 municipalities

Government Interviews

Dr. Ted Redekop, Chief Occupational Medical Officer, Workplace Safety and Health Division, and staff, July 22
Nancy Anderson, Manager of Client Services, Employment Standards Branch, Aug 18
Maureen Spiers, Director of Inspections and Licencing. Manitoba Liquor Control Commission, Aug. 28
Elaine Martin, City of Winnipeg, Dept.of Risk Management, and staff, Aug. 21

Out of Province Government Interviews

Greg Everett, Calgary Boxing and Wrestling Commission, June 18
Orest Zmyndak, Edmonton Boxing and Wrestling Commission, Aug. 20
Merv Unger, Nanaimo Boxing and Wrestling Commission, Aug 28

Venue Interviews

Bar Industry owner/operators = 5
Nightclub entertainment promoters = 2

Entertainment Industry Interviews

Brian Howell, photojournalist (Vancouver), June 22
Circus organization representative, TZ Productions, June 30
Rick Skene, film and stage stunt coordinator, July 8
Bertram Schneider, Winnipeg Fringe Festival, July 9
Steve Schipper, MTC Artistic Director, and staff, Aug. 21

Out of Province Industry Interviews

Edward Giovanetti, wrestler/former Oregon Boxing and Wrestling Commissioner, June 16
John Parlett, BC promoter/training school operator, June 16th
Steve Combs, APW California professional wrestling trainer, June 17
Chris Tidwell, Ontario professional wrestler, June 17 and others
Chris Drury, Ontario wrestling promoter, June 17 and others
Murray Cairns, BC professional wrestler, June 17 and others
Darren Metzelaar, Alberta wrestler/broadcaster June 22 and others
Bret Komarno, BC wrestler, July 3
Rich Hering, WWE Vice-president and John Ruzich, legal counsel, July 8 and August 15
Ron Rivera, California trainer and promoter, Aug 25
Randy Unruh, Alberta retired wrestler, Sept. 15

Appendix "C"- Related Government Documentation and Interview summaries

Legislation:

WORKPLACE SAFETY AND HEALTH ACT

"worker" includes

(a) any person who is employed by an employer to perform a service whether for gain or reward, or hope of gain or reward or not,

(b) any person engaged by another person to perform services, whether under a contract of employment or not

(i) who performs work or services for another person for compensation or reward on such terms and conditions that he is, in relation to that person, in a position of economic dependence upon that person more closely resembling the relationship of any employee than that of an independent contractor, and

(ii) who works or performs services in a workplace which is owned or operated by the person who engages him to perform services,

(c) any person undergoing training or serving an apprenticeship at an educational institution or at any other place; (« travailleur »)

Further duties of employer

4(2) Without limiting the generality of an employer's duty under subsection (1), every employer shall

(a) provide and maintain a workplace, necessary equipment, systems and tools that are safe and without risks to health, so far as is reasonably practicable;

(b) provide to all his workers such information, instruction, training, supervision and facilities to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the safety, health and welfare at work of all his workers;

(c) ensure that all his workers, and particularly his supervisors, foremen, chargehands or similar persons, are acquainted with any safety or health hazards which may be encountered by the workers in the course of their service, and that workers are familiar with the use of all devices or equipment provided for their protection;

(d) conduct his undertaking in such a way as to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that persons who are not in his service are not exposed to risks to their safety or health arising out of, or in connection with activities in his workplace;

DUTIES OF WORKERS

General duties of workers

Every worker while at work shall, in accordance with the objects and purposes of this Act,

(a) take reasonable care to protect his safety and health and the safety and health of other persons who may be affected by his acts or omissions at work;

(b) at all times, when the nature of his work requires, use all devices and wear all articles of clothing and personal protective equipment designated and provided for his protection by his employer, or required to be used and worn by him by the regulations;

DUTIES OF CONTRACTORS

Duties of contractors

7.1 Every contractor shall

(a) ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable,

(i) that every workplace where an employer, employer's worker or self-employed person works pursuant to a contract with the contractor, and

(ii) that every work process or procedure performed at a workplace by an employer, employer's worker or self employed person pursuant to a contract with the contractor, that is not in the direct and complete control of that employer or self-employed person does not create a risk to the safety or health of any person;

DUTIES OF SUPPLIERS

Duties of suppliers

7.3 Every supplier shall

(a) ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that any tool, equipment, machine, device or chemical or biological substance provided by the supplier for use at a workplace

(i) is safe when used in accordance with the instructions provided by the supplier, and

(ii) conforms with the requirements of this Act and the regulations;

(b) when prescribed by regulation, provide written instructions and information prescribed by regulation to every employer, self-employed person, contractor or prime contractor to whom the supplier supplies any tool, equipment, machine, device or chemical or biological substance; and

(c) comply with this Act and the regulations.

Duties of director of division

12 The director of the division shall, in accordance with the objects and purposes of this Act,

(a) be concerned with workplace safety and health generally, and with the maintenance of reasonable standards for the protection of the safety and health of workers and self-employed persons in Manitoba;

(b) be responsible for the administration of this Act and the regulations;

(c) submit from time to time to the minister such recommendations as he considers appropriate for the making of regulations;

(d) ensure that persons and organizations concerned with the purposes of this Act are provided with information and advice pertaining to its administration and to the protection of the safety and health of workers generally;

(e) prepare and maintain or cause to be prepared and maintained illness, death and accident statistics relating to workers and self-employed persons, and do so either alone or in conjunction with The Workers Compensation Board, the Department of Health, or any other department, agency or commission; and

(f) do such other things in connection with safety and health in the workplace as the minister may direct, for the purposes of carrying out the provisions of this Act and the regulations and the provisions of any other Act or regulations assigned to the minister for administration.

Powers of director

13 The director, through the division, may, in accordance with the objects and purposes of this Act,

(a) provide assistance to persons concerned with safety and health in the workplace, and provide services to assist workplace safety and health committees, employers and workers in maintaining reasonable standards for the protection of the safety and health of workers;

(b) carry out studies and research, or cause studies and research to be carried out, and make arrangements for the publication of results of research, in matters relating to the safety and health of workers;

(c) encourage, develop and conduct, either alone or in co-operation with organizations concerned with the purposes of this Act, education and information programs for promoting the safety and health of workers and for improving the qualifications of persons concerned with workplace safety and health;

(d) make recommendations to the minister regarding grants of moneys for any of the purposes referred to in this section; and

(e) perform such other functions as the minister may direct for the proper administration of this Act and the regulations.

RIGHT TO REFUSE DANGEROUS WORK

Right to refuse dangerous work

43(1) Subject to this section, a worker may refuse to work or do particular work at a workplace if he or she believes on reasonable grounds that the work constitutes a danger to his or her safety or health or to the safety or health of another worker or another person.

Reporting the refusal

43(2) A worker who refuses to work or do particular work under subsection (1) shall promptly report the refusal and the reasons for it to his or her employer or immediate supervisor, or to any other person in charge at the workplace.

Employer not to make worker work in unsafe conditions

43.3(1) When the employer at a workplace or his or her agent, or the supervisor or another person representing the employer at the workplace in a supervisory capacity, knows or ought to know of a condition at the workplace that is or is likely to be dangerous to the safety or health of a worker, he or she shall not require or permit any worker to do that work until the dangerous condition is remedied.

Workplace safety and health committee

40(1) Every employer shall establish a workplace safety and health committee

(a) for each workplace where at least 20 of the employer's workers are regularly employed; and

(b) for any other individual workplace or class of workplace designated by written order of the director

The Liquor Control Act

Obligations of Licensee

96(1) The licensee of any licensed premises shall not:

(a) allow any person to play any game or sport that is contrary to the Criminal Code (Canada) therein;

(a.2) permit unlawful activities or conduct in or about the licensed premises not referred to in clause (a) or (a.1);

(b) permit disorderly persons to be in or about the premises;

Disorderly conduct
120(4) No person shall be disorderly in or about licensed premises.

The Employment Standards Code

Children and Adolescents - note : under 16 is a "child", 16 and 17 are "adolescent".

Employment of individual under 16
83(2) Subject to this section, no person shall employ a child without a permit obtained, on application, from the director and except in accordance with the permit

Certain employment of children prohibited
83(3) The director shall not issue a permit under subsection (2) to allow a child to work in a business if, in his opinion, the safety, health or well-being of the child is likely to be adversely affected.

84 (2) An adolescent who is employed is deemed to be an adult for the purpose of this Code.

Summary of Interviews

WORKPLACE SAFETY AND HEALTH

The Department stated that the use of a regulatory framework to enforce safe workplaces is a "blunt instrument" and the Act and regulations are based on the principle of internal responsibility. Promoters, performers and other members of the industry could develop an Industry Code of Practice which could be important if an incident was investigated, and charges could result if no such precautions were being exercised.
The Department had not regulated pro wrestling considering it to be a sport, however now agree to the description of pro wrestling as a carnival art and subject to regulations, as are other entertainment activities.

The Department considers it reasonable that a wrestling ring be considered a workplace that would fall under the Act and related regulations for workplace structures. The idea that promoters should use a ring that meets standards is seen as prudent, as is the practice of promoters being licensed.

Department officials expressed a concern that in the case of a venue having a financial interest in an event (paying a fee for the show), the venue itself could be seen as a prime contractor and in conjunction with the sub-contractor (the promoter), a venue could carry responsibility or liability for an incident.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

A concern among performers emerged during the study period about the growing use of contracts by some promoters, who are compelling performers to sign without benefit of counsel or regulatory review.

The consultants raised the issue of whether wrestlers are employees or independent contractors. The Department responded that despite what a contract may state, they would assess a range of factors, including the degree of control, ownership of tools, risk of profit or loss, integration into the business, and other tests to decide whether any issue was an employee or contractor responsibility.

A contract that grants exclusivity might influence the determination of an employees status. Making someone handle the ring (an onerous, sometimes even dangerous job which carries with it a high degree of responsibility) and engaging in retribution for those who refuse suggests control of an employee. An employee would be entitled to minimum wage, overtime pay, notice of termination.

MLCC

The MLCC advised that a private wrestling promoter is not eligible for an occasional liquor permit i.e. to independently rent a hall, sell liquor and hold a show. Therefore, since alcohol-included events hosted by a private promoter can only be held under the auspices of licensees, the promoter would be responsible to the license holder, and not to MLCC. The onus is on the licensee to enforce age restrictions, and monitor care and control of the event, i.e. "The entertainment does not lead to disorderly conduct."

In the 1980's, games involving patrons, such as Velcro walls and the mechanical bull emerged. MLCC discontinued approval of bar games/entertainment (except for exotic entertainment), and only suggests a four-foot buffer around a ring (same as for a pool table).

Licensee staff and manager on duty are prohibited from consuming alcohol during their hours on shift. There is no regulation against performers or promoters drinking either during the show or as part of the show.

There is strict regulation against promoting abusive drinking. These rules include a drink or coupon must be purchased, minimum drink pricing, and alcohol cannot be given away as prizes or as inducements.

A licensee that permits a wrestling company to feature a chug-a-lug contest between a wrestler and a fan picked out of the crowd (or between wrestlers), is in violation of The Liquor Control Act as this promotes abusive drinking. A promotion that breaks beer bottles (used as weapons) at ringside and where wrestlers fight outside the ring may put a licensee in violation of regulations prohibiting disorderly conduct

A licensee is NOT obligated to carry ANY third party liability coverage as a condition of liquor licensing. Therefore, the potential exists for an uninsured promoter to hold an event in uninsured premises with the major responsibility for the outcome of activities falling on the licensee.

CITY OF WINNIPEG

The City provided the following information.

The City of Winnipeg is supportive of the efforts of this report as they have concerns surrounding wrestling events held at City owned facilities. Most individuals or groups wishing to rent or lease a City venue must complete a Facility Use Agreement and supply evidence of insurance. There are core common insurance requirements applicable to anyone doing business with the City of Winnipeg.
Four standard requirements apply to most Facility Use Agreements, with one additional requirement tailored to the particular situation (in this case wrestling):

- Commercial general liability insurance, in the amount of at least two million dollars ($2,000,000) all inclusive
- The City of Winnipeg to be added as an additional insured
- Evidence of a cross liability clause
- Minimum fifteen (15) day notice of cancellation clause
- Additional requirement: "operations to include entertainment style wrestling"

With the exception of the last one, these requirements are not unique to wrestling. However, the City acknowledges that it has become increasingly difficult for wrestling promoters to fulfill City insurance requirements. While there are always a number of variables, it is possible that given the current state of the insurance market some promoters are unable to operate as they simply cannot afford current insurance pricing. Lack of controls within the industry makes it very difficult for insurers to underwrite the risk, likely driving up the price.
The City must balance the needs and desires of Community Centres wishing to host revenue generating wrestling events, against protecting City assets. Therefore, the City would not entertain a reduction in the existing insurance requirements. The City concurs that a regulated and safe industry structure could assist the availability of insurance. Regulations and self-policing would likely be seen in the insurance industry as positive steps towards solving current issues.
The City indicated it would welcome recommendations for safe operation. The City of Winnipeg would certainly look at resulting regulations and determine the feasibility of incorporating them into their requirements.

Appendix "D" - Assessment and Analysis of Rings

The Wrestling Ring

The wrestling ring is the stage where the performance takes place. The ring structure is elemental in performer and spectator safety. The ring must be designed, set up, and maintained to ensure it capable of providing **a safe platform every time it is used**. The ring must also include an adequate **buffer/safety zone** around the ring that is appropriate for the venue and make-up of the audience.

Ring Construction

The ring is the platform for the wrestling event to take place on. The basic ring design consisted of the following.

There are four corner posts supporting a beam/joist system that is covered with a wood deck. Overlaid on this wood deck are several thin layers of cushion padding and the canvas surface. Underneath, the main beam is supported by one or two springed posts. These provide support and flexibility to the deck, which allows the wrestlers to "bump". Flexibility is an important issue to the wrestlers. Some wrestlers' routines are based on a certain flexibility to the deck when "bumping". When the **flexibility is not there**, performances are affected, and there is a **potential for injury.**

The corner posts are stabilized by using wire rope cable system. Most commercially and locally built rings appear to use round posts, while one had square posts. One of the rings reviewed by the study did not follow this pattern, in that the posts were square. One performer raised concerns that square posts were more of an impediment to performers when working outside of the ring because the square design had more resistance, whereas a round post would cause a deflection if impacted. It was also pointed out that protuberances such as carrying bars and mountings welded onto the posts, could cause a hazard to a performer who is being "run into" the ringpost. **None of the ringposts** extending above the height of the top ring rope **had protective padding.**

On the wrestling surface, the perimeter of the ring is defined by three wrapped wire rope cables connected to the corner posts by turnbuckles.

The individual ring rope is a loop constructed of 0.375" diameter wire rope clamped together with two cable clips. It was noted that some rings may use 1" rope wrapped in tape. The rope corners have protective covers, but there were **no covers on the turnbuckles**. As some performers use the corner top rope to leap, the top turnbuckle may need to have a padded cover in the event the performer slips.

The ring **ropes need to be properly padded** and wrapped with non-rotating sleeves to ensure maximum protection to wrestlers as they climb and use the ropes as part their performance. **Tensioning the ring ropes** is a matter of "feel" and is not usually set by a measuring device. However in doing so **ring posts can become misaligned** and/or the tension on the **cross cables** beneath can cause them to **snap** when the ring is impacted.

In general, the rings viewed by the study were constructed in a similar manner. There were variations on the theme than do merit consideration and concern.

Currently, there are about **11 rings in use** in Manitoba. The study physically examined four different wrestling rings used in Manitoba. The rings consisted of three that were locally built, and one that was imported from a wrestling ring manufacturer in Ohio. In addition other members of the group viewed 3 other rings in performances.

The two locally constructed rings were quite different in construction, and **neither ring possessed any engineering certification** regarding design and construction. Both rings used a perimeter wrap cable around the bottom of the posts along with diagonal cross cable braces. One ring had short extension posts attached to the main posts. It was noted at the time that the connections did not have all the bolts installed. In fact, the **outside bolt**, which is essential to keep the two pieces properly aligned, particularly when cross cables are attached to it, **was missing.**

This led to the posts being out of alignment vertically, as well as the ring's ropes. During the performance, one of the experienced wrestlers attempted to straighten the ring out by running across the ring and colliding with the corner.

One of the rings was constructed using wood joists on edge, while the other consisted of metal beams and joists. Some of the wrestlers noted that the ring with wood joists lacked bounce - was **like "concrete"** because the construction was too stiff which affected performances by limiting what some of the wrestlers would do. The metal joist ring had a single centre king post with a centre connecting plate for the beams. Again some of the connecting **bolts were missing**. The joists were connected to the perimeter and interior beams by safety pins.

The deck was entirely plywood. The wire rope cabling system underneath to maintain stability raised concerns as **not all proper rigging hardware and components were used.** This resulted in wire rope **being crushed** due to too sharp a bend, and **insufficient tension** to maintain the corner posts in vertical alignment when the ring ropes are tightened. The **canvas cover** on both of the rings tended to be loose fitting and **was not snug and taut**. The **underpadding** was often overlapped and **left ridges**. Research into ring construction in the broader industry experience indicates that too much padding causes bruising for performers who prefer a deck with "give" to one with no give and 2-3" of padding. The **hygienic condition** of some of the rings' canvass covers **was unsatisfactory**.

There is **another ring design** used in Manitoba that has full-sized wood planking for both the deck and support beams. Members of the study have reviewed video images that showed this type of ring **failing** when the support beams **cracked**. This ring also used extension posts.

Ring Set Up

Of the two locally built rings that the study expert observed, and in discussion with other promoters about industry practice, a common theme was the necessity to **set the ring up properly**. Some of the comments made to the study concerned having the proper people around who knew how to set the ring up. **Neither** of the locally built rings **had documentation or instructions** on how to set up the ring, if none of the experienced personnel were there. It appears that few of the rings come equipped with ring stairs but this seems to be of little concern to performers.

Ring Maintenance

The study was made aware of some of the locally constructed rings having to be modified or repaired after use. It appears that some of the ring construction was designed through trial and error methodology. Based on the experiences with older rings used in the 70's, generations of local rings were designed and used, and as flaws were discovered, remedial measures were implemented.

A common issue was the problem of **welds breaking** due to the wear and tear on the structure, which the study group saw evidence of on a third ring that was examined. The rings viewed by the study **did not have any log as to when repairs were done** to the structure and what they consisted of. The maintenance of the hygienic condition of the canvass was a area where there was little consistency. Rings were not hygienically cleaned on a regular basis and there were no provisions during performances to adequately and properly **clean up body fluids**.

Appendix "E" - Sample Training Outline

OUTLINE of TRAINING

To begin to understand the inner workings of the performance art we call "Professional Wrestling" it is necessary to examine the skill sets that an individual must be introduced to as a novice. As might be expected, certain aspects of these skills are taught in the classic "lock-step" fashion *(e.g. the mechanics of a safe flip or sequences of holds and reversals, etc)*. Overall however, the educational style in which the novice is acculturated into fraternal structure of this sub-culture of show business resembles more closely that of an apprenticeship/mentorship relationship.

And so, notwithstanding that even a properly trained novice is not guaranteed any degree of professional success, we have identified three common outcomes which must serve as the basis on which to qualify an individual as having been safely trained for the performance:

The individual must display knowledge of safe ring practices *(safe for the individual, his partner/opponent and the audience)*

This should include the basics for physical safety:

- proper conditioning, nutrition and hygiene
- ring construction
- amateur wrestling fundamentals
- aerial and "high spot" stunt manoeuvres

The individual must display a basic understanding of how to use his performance skills to entertain a paying audience *(e.g. using sequences of wrestling manoeuvres to manipulate a desired response from the audience)*

This should include:

- Insider "tricks of the trade" *(e.g. silent communication, pulling punches, protecting other performers during difficult stunts, etc.)*
- Aspects of showmanship *(e.g. character development, costuming, public speaking, self-promotion etc.)*
- Minimum 100 hours of involvement with all aspects of a live production

The individual must display understanding of and acquiescence to the process by which a performer becomes acculturated into the fraternity of the Professional Wrestler and life on the road *(e.g. indoctrination into an age old sub-culture which heavily emphasizes the value of life/stage experience and the transmission of cultural currency through oral teaching)*

This should include:

Proper respect for those with more experience, because in this culture experience translates into safe performance *(similar to the varying degrees of respectful behaviour* *which must be displayed from novice Judo players to their Masters and those who have achieved higher respect/belts)*

- All aspects of professional and locker room etiquette
- Safe and sane behaviour while "on the road"
- Assembling and transporting of equipment and costumes
- Budgeting and travel arrangements

(Note: this final category is traditionally transmitted orally over time as appropriate mentor/apprentice relationships develop between veteran performers and rookies)

Appendix "F" - Examples of Safety-related Elements within Industry Contracts

Excerpts from standard professional performer booking contract, year 2000

Under Section 8. COMPANY'S OBLIGATIONS

8.1 Although under paragraph 9.1 TALENT shall bear responsibility for obtaining appropriate licenses for participating in wrestling exhibitions, COMPANY shall be responsible for obtaining all other appropriate licenses to conduct professional wrestling exhibitions involving TALENT. If COMPANY, at its discretion, agrees to assist TALENT in obtaining his licenses, TALENT shall reimburse COMPANY for its fees and expenses incurred in connection therewith.

8.2 COMPANY shall bear the following costs in connection with the development and enhancement of the value of TALENT's performance hereunder and TALENT's standing in the professional wrestling community, all of which shall benefit TALENT:

(a) In connection with TALENT's appearances and performance at Events staged before a live audience, COMPANY shall bear the cost of location rental, COMPANY's third party comprehensive liability insurance for the benefit of the venues, applicable state and local admission taxes, promotional assistance, sound and light equipment, wrestling ring, officials, police and fire protection, and such additional security guards as COMPANY shall require in its discretion during a professional wrestling match;

Under Section 9. TALENT'S OBLIGATIONS

9.1 TALENT shall bear responsibility for obtaining all appropriate licenses to engage in, participate in, or otherwise appear in professional wrestling exhibitions.

9.2 TALENT shall be responsible for TALENT's own training, conditioning, and maintenance of wrestling skills and abilities, as long as they do not interfere with TALENT's appearance at scheduled events as follows:

(a) TALENT shall establish his own training program, shall select time of training, duration of training, exercises, pattern of exercise and other actions appropriate to obtaining and maintaining physical fitness for wrestling. TALENT shall select his own training apparatus, including mats, weights, machines and other exercise paraphernalia. TALENT is responsible for supplying his own training facilities and equipment, whether by purchase, lease, license, or otherwise.

(b) TALENT shall establish his own method of physical conditioning, shall select time for conditioning, duration of conditioning and form of conditioning. TALENT shall select time for sleep, time for eating, and time for other activities. TALENT shall select his own foods, vitamins and other ingested items, excepting illegal and/or controlled substances and drugs, which are prohibited by COMPANY's Drug Policy.

9.4 TALENT shall use best efforts in employing TALENT's skills and abilities as a professional TALENT and be responsible for developing and executing the various details, movements, and maneuvers required of wrestlers in a professional wrestling exhibition.

9.5 TALENT shall take such precautions as are appropriate to avoid any unreasonable risk of injury to other wrestlers in any and all Events. These precautions shall include, without limitation, pre-match review of all wrestling moves and maneuvers with wrestling partners and opponents; and pre-match demonstration and/or practice with wrestling partners and opponents to insure familiarity with anticipated wrestling moves and maneuvers during a wrestling match. In the event of injury to TALENT, and/or TALENT's partners and opponents during a wrestling match, TALENT shall immediately signal partner, opponent and/or referees that it is time for the match to end; and TALENT shall finish the match forthwith so as to avoid aggravation of such injury.

9.9 TALENT agrees to cooperate fully and in good faith with COMPANY to obtain any and all documentation, applications or physical examinations as may be required by any governing authority with respect to TALENT's appearance and/or performance in a professional wrestling match.

9.12 (a) TALENT shall be responsible for his own commercial general liability insurance, worker's compensation insurance, professional liability insurance, as well as any excess liability insurance, as TALENT deems appropriate to insure, indemnify and defend TALENT with respect to any and all claims arising out of TALENT's own acts, transactions, or conduct.

(b) TALENT acknowledges that the participation and activities required by TALENT in connection with TALENT's performance in a professional wrestling exhibition may be dangerous and may involve the risk of serious bodily injury. TALENT knowingly and freely assumes full responsibility for all such inherent risks as well as those due to the negligence of COMPANY, other TALENTs or otherwise.

9.13 (a) TALENT may at his election obtain health, life and/or disability insurance to provide benefits in the event of physical injury arising out of TALENT's professional activities; and TALENT acknowledges that COMPANY shall not have any responsibility for such insurance or payment in the event of physical injury arising out of TALENT's professional activities.

(b) In the event of physical injury arising out of TALENT's professional activities, TALENT acknowledges that TALENT is not entitled to any worker's compensation coverage or similar benefits for injury, disability, death or loss of wages; and TALENT shall make no claim against COMPANY for such coverage or benefit.

9.14 TALENT shall act at all times with due regard to public morals and conventions during the term of this Agreement. If TALENT shall have committed or shall commit any act or do anything that is or shall be an offense or violation involving moral turpitude under Federal, state or local laws, or which brings TALENT into public disrepute, contempt, scandal or ridicule, or which insults or offends the community or any employee, agent or affiliate of COMPANY or which injures TALENT's reputation in COMPANY's sole judgment, or diminishes the value of TALENT's professional wrestling services to the public or COMPANY, then at the time of any such act, or any time after COMPANY learns of any such act, COMPANY shall have the right to fine TALENT in an amount to be determined by COMPANY; and COMPANY shall have the right to suspend and/or terminate this Agreement forthwith.

Under section 10. WARRANTY

10.2 TALENT represents, warrants and agrees that TALENT is in sound mental and physical condition; that TALENT is suffering from no disabilities that would impair or adversely affect TALENT's ability to perform professional wrestling services; and that TALENT is free from the influence of illegal drugs or controlled substances, which can threaten TALENT's well being and pose a risk of injury to TALENT or others. To insure compliance with this warranty, TALENT shall abide by COMPANY's Drug Policy for TALENT, as well as any and all amendments, additions, or modifications to the COMPANY's Drug Policy implemented during the Term of this Agreement and consents to the sampling and testing of his urine in accordance with such Policy. In addition, TALENT agrees to submit annually to a complete physical examination by a physician either selected or approved by COMPANY. COMPANY's current Drug Policy, which TALENT acknowledges herewith receiving, is annexed hereto and incorporated by reference and made a part hereof.

10.3 COMPANY reserves the right to have TALENT examined by a physician of its own choosing at its expense at any point during the Term of this Agreement.

Appendix "G" – ARTICLES

Full copies of the following articles are available for viewing at the two Legislative Library locations:

Provincial Archives Bldg.
Main Floor, 200 Vaughan Street
Wpg, Mb R3C 1T5
Phone 945-4330, fax 948-1312
legislative_library@gov.mb.ca
Open 10:00am-5:00pm, Mon.-Fri.

Legislative Building
Room 260-450 Broadway
Wpg. Mb, R3C 0V8
Phone 945-4243, fax 948-2617
Open 8:30am-5:30pm, Mon.-Thurs.
8:30am-4:30pm, Fridays
Intersession-8:30am-4:30pm, Mon.-Fri.

Historical

NEWS OF THE MAT WORLD (Ring Magazine, January, 1934) By "Tex" Austin

General news from the North American wrestling scene, discussions about the top-three wrestlers on the continent, and a list of states that have athletic commissions to regulate wrestling.

ON THE HOOF (Saturday Evening Post, December 14, 1935) By Milton MacKaye

A review of the economic growth of the wrestling industry, and information about the wrestlers and promoters that earned the most money.

GEORGE GORDIENKO'S 'AUTOBIOGRAPHY' (prepared for the Cauliflower Alley Club, October 19, 2000) **By George Gordienko**

A first-person account of Mr. Gordienko's wrestling history, and his transition to a career as an artist.

Medical

THE PHYSICIAN AND SPORTSMEDICINE - VOL 28 - NO. 5 - MAY 2000

Pain and Injury Are Real in Professional Wrestling

Several doctors' experiences and perspectives regarding injury trends in professional wrestling, including comments about injuries to children that attempt to copy wrestling moves.

Professional Wrestling Injuries in the News

A quick scan of several lay publications revealed a number of reports of injuries in professional wrestling. For example:

- Owen Hart died from injuries he sustained during a stunt at a World Wrestling Federation event in Kansas City, Missouri, in May 1999, when he fell from a catwalk to the ring floor.
- Darren Drozdov fractured two cervical vertebrae and underwent surgery in October 1999 when he was thrown to the mat by his opponent.
- Stone Cold Steve Austin was to undergo surgery in early 2000 to repair a mid-cervical bone spur and disk protrusion.
- Minnesota governor Jesse Ventura, a former pro wrestler, complained of back injuries during a speech to travel executives in July 1999. Though he declined further comment, his spokesperson said he aggravated an old back injury as a result of normal weekend activities.
- Actor Jim Carrey suffered a neck injury in September 1998 during a scene with professional wrestler Jerry Lawler.

Sources: *USA Today, New York Times,* Minneapolis *Star Tribune, Amusement Business*

Injury-Related Professional Wrestling Lingo

Most sports have their own lingo that's privy to participants, and professional wrestling is no exception. Here are some injury-related terms along with their "translations."

Selling the move: pretending to be in pain
Shoot: real pain
Working an injury: choreographing an injury
Taking the bump: being thrown and landing on the back
Getting stiffed: getting hit harder than expected
Crowbar: an opponent who hits harder than he or she is supposed to

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Wrestler deaths as of 1999
Wrestler /Age/ Cause of Death/ Date
Andre Roussmoff (Andre the Giant) 46 heart attack 1/27/93 Kerry Adkisson (Kerry Von Erich) 33 suicide 2/18/93 Adolpho Bresciano (Dino Bravo) 44 murder 3/11/93 Larry Cameron 41 heart attack during match 12/13/93 Ray Canty (Ray Candy) 43 heart attack 5/23/94 Art Barr (Love Machine) 28 alcohol and pain killers 11/23/94 Jerry Blackwell (Crusher) 45 pneumonia 1/22/95 Thomas Gilbert III (Eddie Gilbert) 33 heart attack after using cocaine 2/18/95 John Minton (Big John Studd) 46 liver cancer 3/20/95 Hart Richard Murdoch (Dick Murdoch) 49 heart attack 6/15/96 Neil Caricole (Neil Superior) 33 heart attack after steroid use 8/23/96 Brian Pillman 35 heart attack after using cocaine 10/5/97

Louis Mucciolo (Louie Spicolli) 27 heart attack after using drugs and alcohol 2/15/98 Sylvester Ritter (Junkyard Dog) 45 auto accident 6/2/98 Brian Hauser (Shane Shamrock) 23 shot by police during domestic dispute 8/17/98 Richard Wilson (Renegade) 33 suicide 2/23/99 Owen Hart (Blue Blazer) 34 fell from ceiling cable during match 3/23/99 *Source: Wrestling Observer Newsletter.*

State laws and practices

New Rules in New York State

Wrestling Observer June 25th, 2003

An article about drug testing regulations, and the effects of no longer requiring performers to be licensed.

Pro wrestling in tussle with regulators over rules
State commission wants licensing (North Carolina)

By MOLLY HENNESSY-FISKE, Staff Writer,
Raleigh News and Observer

An article about the proposal to appoint a commission to regulate wrestling in North Carolina

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Legislators propose 'wrestling' law (Illinois)

Friday, August 29, 2003

By Chris Hack
Chicago Daily Southtown
Staff writer

A paralyzed teen results in a proposal in the state legislature to require wrestling broadcasters to warn viewers that the moves are choreographed.

Mark Roth, Inlewd.com editorial, Sept. 8/2003 (Delaware)

The Dover City Council takes legislative steps to stop the use of foreign objects in local wrestling shows.

Entertainment

Circuses

EUROCRATS DECREE TRAPEZE ARTISTS SHALL WEAR HARD HATS

David Sapsted
The Daily Telegraph

An article about Moscow State Circus trapeze artists being required to don safety headgear because of European regulations covering workers employed at heights greater than the average stepladder.

Appendix "G" - ARTICLES

Historical

NEWS OF THE MAT WORLD (Ring Magazine, January, 1934) By "Tex" Austin

In the last issue of The RING, we gave our readers the first annual ranking of wrestlers, something never before attempted by any publication, and judging by the number of letters we received from all over the world, particularly from members of boxing commissions, The RING is to be complimented on its fine selections. For example, our readers will recall that we chose Jim Browning first; Jim Londos second, and Don George third, in our list, and although we did not consider the status of these three wrestlers as far as championship recognition was concerned in the various states, we were elated to find that our rating met with world-wide approval.

A letter from Canada shows that Jim Browning has been honored in that territory by being given first ranking, and messages from various states in our country show that 22 states have acclaimed Browning the kingpin. Jim Londos received the nomination in only nine states, and Don George in six. Thus The RING's rating for 1933 stands out. Browning came through a stiff month's campaign with colors flying. The Missouri gentleman-farmer makes the rounds of the U.S. and Canada without a loss to mar his record since ascending the throne through his win over Strangler Lewis.

Regardless of whatever else may be said about Browning, no one will deny that he is a skilled and clever grappler and fearless. He'll meet any one. He may not possess as much color as some of the others, but what he lacks along those lines, he more than makes up for in ability and willingness. Londos, recipient of second honors in our ranking, has started off on another country-wide tour of victories after defeating Kola Kwariani before his countrymen in Greece. He and Browning will meet soon as the Londos and Curley groups have combined. Don George, who captured third honors, invaded New York and showed plenty of class and skill in time-limit affairs. George is a fast, clever, and clean matman, and will probably meet Browning in a finish match before the summer's over.

Here is the way the various commissions answered when asked whom they recognized as world champion in their locality. Browning is recognized as champion in the following states and localities: Arkansas, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Washington, Wisconsin, Wyoming, and all of Canada, including the provinces of Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia.

The National Wrestling Association claims support in Mississippi, but there is no mat competition in that state. Mississippi falls into line because Harry J. Landry, president of the N.W.A., resides at Friars Point, Miss. Other N.W.A. states which recognize Londos are Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri and

The fact is that, despite the indifference of the swankier trade, wrestling is now the most solvent of sports. The American public in these difficult times is paying some $5,000,000 a year to see the behemoths tug, haul, pull, shove and hurl each other about. Nightly, in a hundred smoke-filled arenas, the customers gather to witness the dreadful carnage and to push real money through the ticket windows. Any industry that can gross $5,000,000 a year is big business and deserves respectful attention from the realists of finance. No public, whatever the cynics say, has ever paid $5,000,000 to see potato races. Tex Rickard was the man who put golden handcuffs on pugilism. He created the million-dollar gate, and since his time the legend has persisted that boxing is pure bonanza. As a matter of truth, until the recent bout between Joe Louis and Max Baer there had not been a million-dollar gate since Dempsey fought Tunney at Chicago in 1927. Boxing is in the doldrums. The public, nevertheless, is still inclined to believe, as a result of the publicity which isolated large purses receive, that boxing is the most profitable sport, and that any reasonably good boxer may retire after a few compensatory buffets with a rich and satisfying competence. This is an illusion. For all the rude gibes which have accompanied its recrudescence, wrestling today is the more profitable enterprise, and a share of stock in the syndicate which controls it is worth a dozen shares in the companies which stake their all on the five-ounce gloves.

There has never been a million-dollar gate in wrestling. When Frank Gotch met George Hackenschmidt for the championship of the world, in 1911, the net returns were $95,000 - equal, perhaps, to $450,000 by the standards of today - and when Jim Londos and Ed (Strangler) Lewis wrestled in Chicago in 1934, there were receipts of $207,000. Taxes decreased appreciably the net on the latter match. These two competitions hold the record. But there is a sharp difference between a heavyweight pugilistic champion and the journeyman of wrestling. A Dempsey or Tunney or Baer defends his title once a year. A wrestler is active three, four or five times a week. He is constantly on the move, and though his purses are smaller, they fill his pockets with comfortable frequency. Londos, the Greek, who began his career as a dishwasher in a San Francisco restaurant, is generally considered to be the biggest money maker in the history of wrestling. He is said to have earned $2,500,000. This is a considerably larger stake than the great Tunney was able to amass in the boom times of boxing - he received $525,000 for the Tom Heeney match alone - and probably is little surpassed by Dempsey's prodigious returns. Strangler Lewis, mat champion so many times that the statistician becomes dizzy, has earned between $500,000 and $600,000. Gotch made a fortune. Stanislaus and Wladek Zbyszko both retired rich. Joe Stecher, who in his day could and did flop Londos without trouble, was sufficiently solvent when he retired to pay $100,000 in cash for a single plot of land. These gentlemen were the performers and not the promoters. When they profited, the promoters profited in an even greater degree. There seems to be no reason to doubt that, despite its wide publicity, boxing has slipped back as a profit-making enterprise, and that wrestling, like a thief in the night, has sneaked up on the box office and stolen the prize. Wrestling, of course, has seen more glamorous times.

Back in the days of the Rutherford B. Hayes administration, when the G.A.R. still controlled elections and the coal-oil lamp was considered the modern miracle of science, This was considered - and I am indebted for the details of Hackenschmidt's history to Jack Curley, who was his impresario in America - a sizable undertaking. Sandow was ready to fight, break bones, or be shot from a cannon. When Hackenschmidt's patron finally decided that school days were over, the two embarked for London. Sandow was appearing at a music hall, and it was his custom at the end of a theatrical performance to challenge any member of the audience to step forward and equal his feats of strength; he offered an appreciable amount of money if the victim's arteries and nerve centers survived the test. On a fateful Friday night Hackenschmidt and his patron bought a stage box for the London performance. Sandow went through his usual routine, lifting sausages marked plainly "4000 lbs.," snapping crowbars with his bare hands, permitting a dozen men to load themselves on a platform balanced on his chest and then lifting platform and all with one puff of his pneumatic lungs. Then came the challenge.

At that moment - such was the careful planning - Hackenschmidt dropped his trousers in the darkness of the box, peeled off his shirt and jumped to the stage in full gymnasium costume. The engagement was brief. Hackenschmidt not only managed all the feats of strength but dusted the floor with Sandow's extremities and then ran him clear into the wings. That finished Sandow and started Hackenschmidt. Hackenschmidt is now a man in his sixties, and the owner of a physical-culture school in London. He was a man of wealth at the time of his American debut, and though postwar declines cut into his principal, he still is entirely solvent. Hack was probably the first professional athlete to decide that there was something in this stuff about the brain. Following his retirement, he became interested in philosophy and metaphysics, and wrote a book. The fact that it received little critical attention is of no importance - when a wrestler writes a book, that is the ultimate answer to the defeatists. Evolution is a workable hypothesis. From ape to man is a sizable step, but from wrestler to articulateness is a geologic age. Hatred of foreign invasion was responsible for the massacres of the Boxer Rebellion and the cash returns of Hackenschmidt's tour of America. Hack met Gotch in 1908 and retired, after one fall, with what he described as an injured ankle. He had also lost his championship. This added to a native belief that one American could lick a dozen foreigners, but not sufficiently to curb Hack's talents as a public attraction.

When he returned to this country again, he packed the auditoriums and managed to throw all the opponents who faced him. Gotch in the meantime had begun to retire. This was a procedure which took four years to come to real fruition. Gotch's retirements were never taken too seriously, and in 1912 he defended his title against Mahmout the Terrible Turk. This was not difficult, and he bought himself another section of Iowa land. It would be pleasant here to report that Gotch was a kindly and equable gentleman who held his own ability in intellectual contempt. The fact is that he was short-tempered, and as irritable as a hibernating bear. He considered himself as important as a United States senator and his manners were very little better. He developed a very personal dislike for Hackenschmidt, and once described him as a "money-hungry greaseball." Gotch was convinced that Hack had quit cold in their 1908 engagement, and missed few public opportunities to say so. A large section of the sporting group agreed with Gotch's diagnosis of Hack's competitive temperament, and Curley, then managing the Russian's tour, and never one to neglect

Wrestling had a few moments of autumnal glory just after the war. The rise of two young athletes in the Middle West created a profitable patriotic fervor in the embattled farm region. These young men - Earl Caddock, of Iowa, and Joe Stecher, of Nebraska - were clean upstanding citizens, free of the poolroom taint and endowed with great natural skill at their art. Caddock's most spectacular maneuver was the toehold, an ingenious method of inflicting sufficient pain to cause an adversary to surrender or turn on his back. Stecher's fame rested on the scissors - a hold which consists in locking the legs around an opponent's midriff and squeezing until a series of gentle crackles announces that his ribs are no longer in one piece. Stecher and Caddock played to full houses. Their most frequent adversaries were the two Zbyszko brothers, Stanislaus and the younger Wladek, and the bull-necked Strangler Lewis.

The Zbyszko brothers were foreigners, and thus represented the menace of king-ridden Europe; Lewis, born in Kentucky (sic), was famous for his headlock, a very brutal treatment of the human skull which was generally reported to result in fractures, concussions, brain lesions and small padded rooms in private sanitariums. When Lewis wrestled, thousands of advocates of fair play could be counted upon to pay their way to the ringside to express their disapproval of his methods. Eventually the first enthusiasm for this five-cornered competition began to take tucks in itself. There was some criticism of the manner in which Caddock, Stecher, the Zbyszkos and Lewis seasonally traded the title among themselves. There were even base attacks upon the sincerity of the athletes themselves, and suggestions that their rivalry was not so bitter and antipathetic as the philippics of their press agents made out. Athletes standing with envious eyes outside the charmed circle charged that a wrestling trust existed, and that the ballyhooed battles of the titans were merely family theatricals. This [illegible]ting of public confidence probably was only a minor factor in the collapse of wrestling as a drawing card.

Its essential weakness as a public spectacle was its dullness. A few men, fortified with a knowledge of the intricate technique of the mat and gathered three-deep around a roped arena, could enjoy the muscular chess playing of the adversaries, admire the deft bridging and swift shifts of posture which countered an offensive. But for a crowd of eight or ten thousand people, hung along the rafters in giant coliseums, it was quite another matter. From the top balconies of the Metropolitan Opera House the singers on the stage may be visible only with spyglass and binoculars, but at least their voices can be heard, and people go there to hear singing. People do not go to wrestling matches to hear singing. The excellent acoustics of any particular auditorium will rarely mollify the gentleman who paid cash money for his ticket and is unable to tell with the naked eye whether Big Boy Benzine or whether the Bonebreaker has gone back on his pledge to give in.

The truth is that wrestling is a sport not cut out for stadiums and bizarre spectacles. Those who have attended championship prize fights and purchased what are laughingly called ringside seats know how difficult it is, even in boxing, to follow from astronomical distances just what is going on down there under the floodlights. But in a boxing match two men are on their feet and moving around the arena. Wrestlers who are fanatically in earnest spend most of their time in a reclining posture, tangled up together like swamp championship match, a counting of the gate receipts showed that a new success formula had been found. The long tussle upon the mat, the protracted inertia at full length, passed out of style. Wrestlers began hurling one another out of the ring, slapping one another's faces, butting heads, kicking, scratching and gouging. They roared imprecations, screamed with pain, bared their teeth in fearful snarls, and on occasion aimed wild swings at the referee. It wasn't wrestling, but no one cared about that; the departure of refinement signaled the return of prosperity. The success of wrestling as a theatrical enterprise requires a constant supply of new blood.

When Sonnenberg's success coined money for promoter Bowser in Boston, rival promoters went out and dug up football players of their own. Jim McMillen, of the University of Illinois, was soon tangling with Jim Londos for promoter Curley in New York; Ed Don George was recruited to dispose of Sonnenberg; Jumping Joe Savoldi, of Notre Dame, became a sensation in Chicago. Various others had a fling at the game - Sam Stein; Len Macaluso, of Colgate; Mike Mazurki, of Manhattan College; Jim Bausch, of Kansas; Tony Siano, of Fordham, and a dozen more. Joe Savoldi's tour de force was known as the "flying drop kick." He leaped high in the air, propelled himself forward and let his opponent have both feet squarely in the mouth. This rarely left the opponent with a friendly feeling, and so annoyed Jim Londos that he refused, after meeting Savoldi, to believe the fanciful story that he, Londos, had lost the match and blithely continued to call himself the champion of the world.

Even before the advent of the football players, the indiscriminate importation of boatloads of foreign talent had been begun. Jack Pfefer, a small, agile gentleman with a deep-purple accent, a cane and a very confident manner, was one of the first impresarios of what has come to be known as "freak talent." Mr. Pfefer, who prefers to speak of himself as the "Little Napoleon," came to this country from Russia, where he had managed grand-opera troupes wandering through the lesser cities of Europe and Asia. He knew nothing whatever about wrestling, but he did know about showmanship and color. One of his first importations - it was back in 1923 - was Ivan Poddubny, known variously as Ivan the Terrible, the Cruel Cossack, and, because of the proportions of his great mustaches, Old Handlebars. Poddubny had indeed once been champion of Europe, but when Pfefer rediscovered him he was sixty years of age. His mustaches, however, were still stiff and luxuriant, he had a chest full of medals and he made a country-wide tour in triumph, tossing all opponents on his route. Eventually Poddubny entered New York with a full-blown reputation as a wonder man, and met Joe Stecher at the Seventy-First Regiment Armory in a match for the world championship. Stecher was one hour and forty minutes in throwing Poddubny. There is a curious sequel. A few weeks after the rich championship match, the Cruel Cossack wrestled Tom Draak, a third-rater, in Newark. Draak pinned his shoulders in twelve minutes. Poddubny went back to Europe to spend his old age at the spas.

Jack Pfefer at that time was an associate of Curley in promotion, and they continued their importations. There was, for instance, Fritz Kley, the German, a massive contortionist; Leo Pinetzki, the long-armed giant from Poland; the immense and billowing Sandor add up to an approximate $5,000,000 a year. In the major cities alone the grosses total $1,500,000. Here they are, and very conservatively estimated: New York, $200,000; Chicago, $200,000; Boston, $400,000; Los Angeles, $400,000; St. Louis, $150,000; Philadelphia, $150,000. And these are only six cities. Big matches swell the totals. A few grosses over a period of years: In New York, Caddock-Stecher, $85,000; Londos-McMillen, $56,000; Londos-Garibaldi, $38,000; Londos-Stein, $44,000; Shikat-Holuban, $35,000; Londos-Holuban, $48,000; in Boston, Sonnenberg-Lewis, $75,000; Sonnenberg-Lewis, return engagement, $68,000; Sonnenberg-George, $62,000. In Los Angeles, a year or so ago, a Brooklyn boy named Frank Leavitt grossed $500,000 for the matches in which he was engaged. He had grown a beard after leaving Brooklyn, and was known on the Coast as Man Mountain Dean. Leavitt, who weighed about 300 pounds, bowled over opponents until Londos came out to meet him. Some 38,000 paid $38,000 to see the match. Leavitt lost. It is only fair to say that this was no surprise to the people who had known him before he grew the beard.

One of the regrettable things about the boxing profession is that many of the most promising candidates for laurels are detoured by adulation and the bright lights. This does not hold true in wrestling. A heavyweight boxing champion fights, at most, twice a year. A heavyweight wrestling champion - and only the heavyweights seem to have box-office value - is engaged at least once a week, and usually oftener. Wrestlers don't have time for the bright lights; they are always on the road. A few have been spoiled by public attention, but most of them are too busy saving money and working to bother about swank and effect. A boxer stays at a good hotel; a wrestler stays in a boarding house. This, perhaps, is the explanation of the statement of Jack Curley, forty years a promoter, that he had never been panhandled by any aging wrestler who was once in his employ. The career of a boxer is necessarily brief; few of them stay in the top flight after the age of thirty-two. Wrestlers go on forever. Londos was wrestling in 1915; he has not yet retired. Strangler Lewis defeated Doctor Roller in 1915, and he still is too much for the football talent. Stan Zbyszko is well past sixty and thinks he could scrimmage a little bit if the purse were large enough. The average wrestler of non-championship caliber makes $20 to $100 a night on the circuits and is engaged five nights a week. That, estimating the indoor season at 170 nights a year, is a very comfortable income. Especially, as one impresario remarked, when you think of what they would make as motormen.

Since wrestling is now an industry, it is probably futile to criticize its theatricals on the basis of sport or to debate about championships. There are no record books, as in boxing, to register the changes of title, and indeed for several years there were a number of simultaneous world champions. At the present time the major promoters are at peace and agreed upon a titleholder. This is an unusual situation and may be changed tomorrow. Since Gotch there has been no king of wrestling recognized by the true connoisseurs of the game. Caddock came nearest to their acclaim, but he only weighed at his weightiest some 168 pounds. There is a general agreement among the students of the game, however, that in a non-theatrical enterprise Caddock, Stecher, the Zbyszkos, and Lewis, in his prime, could have tossed fourteen football players, a boatload of Holubans, and at least two Jim Londoses in an hour's interval. Possibly, George Bothner, lightweight champion from 1898 to 1917, and now a wrestling coach, could have thrown them all. An interesting fact in the consideration of Londos, champion in some circles from 1929 until a few months ago, is that he was thrown a dozen times by Lewis before he conquered the old Strangler before that record-breaking crowd in Chicago.

This, however, is all academic. Wrestling has been opened up and fouls outlawed. The crowd likes the slaughterhouse atmosphere and the cynics go for amusement. It isn't wrestling and it isn't fighting, but the mayhem and rowdiness provide a lot of fun. The crowds have action. During the late '20s and the early '30s your guess was as good as mine about the championship. Mr. Curley and Mr. Bowser, for example, had their own titleholders, and the titleholders never met. The whole affair, what with Lewis and Londos refusing to give up titles after defeat, and with Dick Shikat recognized by the athletic commission of one state, and Ed Don George or Jim Browning by another, became too difficult to follow through to any conclusion. At one time there were five world champions touring the country simultaneously. And when the warring promoters eventually made peace and the championship was located in one man, the enemies of wrestling said that competition had been stifled. They may, of course, have been right.

Danno O'Mahoney, a broth of a boy from the Free State, is now the champion of the world everywhere except in Colorado. There, by a ruling of the state commission, a certain Everett Marshall holds the title, and he was given a belt by the governor to prove it. O'Mahoney may, himself, have become champion by fortuitous choice. There is a story that Mr. Paul Bowser, of Boston, a heavily Irish town, sent scouts to Ireland to sign up Doctor Callaghan, the Olympic weight thrower. Doctor Callaghan, a practicing physician, had no interest in championships or American gold. Gossip has it that the scouts wired back that although Doctor Callaghan was indifferent, they had seen a fine broth of a boy in the Irish National Army. "Sign him up," Colonel Bowser is reported to have replied. O'Mahoney resigned from the army, emigrated and immediately began winning sensational victories in Boston. Eventually, with promoters at peace, the Irish Mr. O'Mahoney managed to clear up disputes over title. In Boston, he threw Ed Don George. He also threw Jim Londos, the only other major claimant.

GEORGE GORDIENKO'S 'AUTOBIOGRAPHY' (prepared for the Cauliflower Alley Club, October 19, 2000) **By George Gordienko**

In 1928 I was born in the city of Winnipeg. I had two older brothers. Sports was a popular pastime and since we were located on the edge of town and almost in the openness of the prairies, there was a lot of space for playing fields. I was big and sturdy for my age. In high school I was one of the star players on the gridiron. I must have been about 15 years old when I got into wrestling. Albert Olsen, who was five or six years older, was responsible.

Albert was a very good, all-round athlete excelling in just about everything. He was the first to get the idea of wrestling. He asked me if I would train with him. I had been training with weights for a couple of years. Our equipment was homemade and crude compared to the competition sets, but that may have been advantageous since were principally concerned with feats of strength, more than body building. Albert joined the R.C.A.F., i.e., the Canadian Air Force, and became a P.T.I. That meant that we could only train together when he was in town on leave. But I continued and found other guys to train with on the mat.

After the war the local club at the Y.M.C.A. expanded when the young men were released from service. Albert was one of the top guys and was the national lightheavyweight champ at one time. There were some others who were pretty good, such as Gordon Nelson, Harold Nelson (no relation), Jake Costello, Steve (The Little Giant) Kozak, and I should not forget Jimmy Trifunov, who was very accomplished and became the coach of the Canadian Olympic team and later was awarded the Order of Canada for his contribution to Canadian culture.

About that time professional wrestling opened in Winnipeg and drew big crowds. The boys came from Minneapolis, out of Tony Stecher's office. I remember seeing Ray Steele, Ed "Strangler" Lewis, Sky Hi Lee, Cliff Gustafson, Dick Raines, Abe Kashey, Sandor Szabo, Joe Pazandak, etc. There were many more of those great "golden oldies" who would need mention.

One night when I was training at the "Y" Wally Karbo and Joe Pazandak made a visit. Joe worked out with me and didn't take me off my feet for six minutes, when Wally called out that Joe should conserve his energy for his coming bout. Not bad for an 18-year-old. I was very strong but lacked knowledge. I think Joe and Wally spoke to Tony Stecher. One day I received a letter from the office asking if I was interesting in going to Minneapolis. I think Joe decided that I would make a good training mate. Well, I accepted and made the journey. I stayed with Joe and we worked out daily unless he made a long trip somewhere. Joe had more confidence when he was at home and he could handle me at first. However, after about a year I could hold my own even for an hour or more. We also trained a bit with weights and played handball. I guess you could say we were in great shape. I had never played handball before. Joe was a good player. Sometime later I took up squash and since there is a similarity, I picked it up fairly quickly. Also, I played with experienced players, which was a help.

It was not too long before I broke in as a "pro." One of my starting matches was with Iron Mike Burnell. Mike was one of the guys I liked and he helped me. I think he could claim to be a former A.A.U. heavyweight champion. He got out of the business a short time later. I think he saved his money and bought some earth-moving equipment. I hope he made out okay. I went to San Francisco, then back to Minneapolis, then on to Buffalo, N.Y., for Ed Don George. I was 18 years old when I broke into the business and I was now 19. I was growing tired of traveling as it did not leave much time for anything else.

When I was in Winnipeg I attended art school and was able to take some lessons in San Francisco as well. I guess I had the "itch." While I was young and had a lifetime ahead of me, I decided to make a break. In hindsight, I did the right thing because now I am doing "my thing" which to me is so satisfying and interesting. It is life itself. I think some people were critical of my departure and rumors flew. I went back to Canada where the art scene was very quiet, at least in western Canada. I worked at odd jobs which I now consider useful since the experiences come together in later life. For me, anyway.

One day in 1953 Stu Hart called me from Calgary and asked if I was interested in working again. Okay. So off I went to Calgary. It worked out alright, though there were long distances between towns. Later in the year I went to Australia. On the return journey, instead of flying back to North America, I exchanged my ticket for passage on an ocean liner to Europe. Can't think of why I did that, and it wasn't a dumb idea. Departed from Sydney and disembarked in Naples, Italy. From there, I took a train to Rome, Florence, and Paris. I spent a few weeks in Paris - and loved it. From there I went to London. I stopped there a fair length of time - 'til my money ran out. I attended St. Martin's School of Art and had Anthony Caro as an instructor in sculpture. Caro became internationally famous and was knighted for his work. When the time came I took an ocean liner again to Quebec City on the St. Lawrence River. I made some money again working for Stu Hart. Through some friends, I heard from Joint Promotions in England they were willing to pay my fare and guarantee my purse money. I had fallen in love with Europe and going back there gave me a feeling of being "at home." A great place for an aspiring artist. I settled into London and it became my headquarters for a number of years.

There was a lot to take in. Cultural life on a very high level. I got to other parts of Europe often: France, Germany, Belgium, Spain, Holland, Austria, Greece, etc. I should mention Paris in particular. There were a couple of boys there who were into painting and had personal showings. They knew Picasso, since he watched wrestling on television and was said to be an avid fan. He would not be disturbed when the bouts were on. Eventually, and to my very good fortune, while I was in the company of the lads who painted we encountered Picasso, and had coffee together. What a polite, well-mannered person. He even insisted on paying. This was truly a high spot in my life.

I also wrestled in other spots around the globe India, the Middle East, a lot of places in Africa, Japan, New Zealand, the Caribbean, etc. In 1975 I got back to serious painting and moved to Italy - which was very good to me. I said goodbye to wrestling this time for good. Life had moved on, and I was no longer a young man. Europe was very good to me, very rich in cultural experiences that could perhaps be described as unparalleled. Now I am back in Canada, on Vancouver Island. I have a quiet location and am trying to put all my experiences together, hoping it will mean something.

Medical

THE PHYSICIAN AND SPORTSMEDICINE - VOL 28 - NO. 5 - MAY 2000

Pain and Injury Are Real in Professional Wrestling

What's the nation's most popular contact sport? Professional wrestling might have football in a headlock. *US News and World Report* estimates that 35 million viewers tune in to professional wrestling each week (1).

Though many consider the choreographed moves of professional wrestling to be entertainment and not sport, physicians who cover events, wrestlers, and an emergency department physician who sees the aftermath of kids copying the wrestling moves all contend that professional wrestling is indeed a contact sport.

James R. Andrews, MD, an orthopedic surgeon at Alabama Sports Medicine and Orthopaedic Center at HealthSouth Medical Center in Birmingham, has operated on professional wrestlers since the 1970s when performers such as Andre the Giant and King Kong Mosca wrestled at the Municipal Auditorium in Columbus, Georgia, where he worked early in his career. "I've probably treated all of the old-timers," he says. "They didn't have any care. They were lost, medically. Many were ex-athletes who came to professional wrestling already beat up from other sports injuries."

He says professional wrestlers grapple with the public's perception that their injuries are contrived or part of the act. "We're seeing more of these injuries as wrestling gets bigger, and the retired wrestlers are suffering with degenerative knees and are becoming disabled as they grow older," Andrews says.

Pro Wrestling's Impact

Professional wrestling traces its roots to turn-of-the-century strongman competitions that were held at carnivals and fairs. Though regional wrestling circuits have existed for decades, professional wrestling's current national popularity is unprecedented.

Brian Dunn, a graduate student in higher education administration at Iowa State University in Ames, is training to become a professional wrestler and has performed in two regional shows as the "heel" (bad guy) Brian Ash. Dunn says more fans, like him, are stepping into the ring. Those who hope to make it to the professional level and those just eager to live out their fantasies are learning the moves at several professional wrestling schools across the national such as Tugboat Taylor's School of Professional Wrestling in Houston and the Monster Factory in Paulsboro, New Jersey.

Dunn notes that the three levels of participation in professional-style wrestling reflect levels of training: highly trained wrestlers in national leagues such as the World Wrestling Federation, those with some training who perform on regional circuits at local gymnasiums and National Guard armories, and untrained individuals who participate in backyard leagues. (Some Web sites offer live video of amateurs performing in their backyards.) "People who are in the business discourage the backyard approach," Dunn says. "A lot of the moves require cooperation so that no one gets hurt," he says.

A relatively recent offshoot of mainstream professional wrestling is extreme wrestling, which incorporates more realistic violence--and real injuries--into the matches. In March, New Jersey's governor and the leader of the state's Assembly introduced legislation to regulate extreme or hardcore wrestling (2).

Injury Patterns

A recent Medline search produced no reports on injuries in professional wrestling. However, Dunn and some physicians who cover the events say they are seeing some patterns emerge (see "Professional Wrestling Injuries in the News," above). Gerard Varlotta, DO, as a boxing ringside physician for the New York State Athletic Commission, has also covered professional wrestling events.

Back injuries. "The major thing we see are herniated disks because of the throws and axial loading impact," says Varlotta, who is also a clinical assistant professor at the New York University Rusk Institute of Rehabilitation Medicine in New York City.

Central to professional wrestling are strategies to prevent injuries, Dunn says. One is "taking the bump" (landing on the back after being thrown) (see "Injury-Related Professional Wrestling Lingo," page 17). "You're supposed to land on the meaty part of your back with your feet planted and your hands slapping the mat to increase the landing surface area to absorb shock," he says. "You produce a sound like a shotgun going off."

Shoulder injuries. Shoulder subluxations are frequent, Varlotta notes; however, true dislocations are rare. Andrews notes that rotator cuff injuries seem to be more common than in the past.

Dunn says he injured his shoulder last year while practicing moves on a trampoline. "The shoulder impingement required 6 weeks of stretching and strengthening in rehab, and shortly before training camp I needed a cortisone injection for the pain," he says.

Rib fractures. Varlotta says that rib fractures are so common that many wrestlers don't even seek treatment for them. Dunn says rib injuries occur when opponents land on their opponents during maneuvers such as the "body splash" without tucking their knees under them to minimize the landing force. "Last December I had complete fractures of ribs 11 and 12 on my right side when I took the force of a 270-lb man," Dunn says. Misplaced opponent knees during other maneuvers are also responsible for rib fractures, he notes.

Muscle and tendon ruptures. Andrews says many muscle and tendon injuries are caused by the strength-training routines that wrestlers use to bulk up for participation. Anterior cruciate ligament ruptures are also fairly common, he says, not just from jumping, landing, and twisting, but also from the effects of past injuries in other sports.

Cervical injuries. Stingers and burners sometimes occur, but Varlotta says wrestlers who have increased neck strength seem better able to absorb some of the stress.

'Team Physician' Issues

Varlotta says from a sports medicine vantage, professional wrestlers are much like other competitive athletes. "Their concern is being able to play. I build their trust by letting them know I will do what I can to keep them playing," he says. One thing Varlotta's not likely to do is prescribe a narcotic and send them into the ring. "That's a signal that they need additional treatment," he says.

So far, there is no organization or targeted resource for physicians who treat professional wrestlers. "An injury is an injury no matter what the sport," Varlotta says. However, there are some specific diagnostic tips that Varlotta is learning through his experience with professional wrestling. For instance, monitoring degenerative spinal changes in heavily muscled patients, such as professional wrestlers, is easier with magnetic resonance imaging or computed tomography than solely with physical exam and x-ray.

Medical coverage at wrestling events seems to improve as wrestlers rise in the ranks. For example, Varlotta says that promoters at national events contract for coverage from physicians and emergency medical technicians and that leagues often employ their own athletic trainers. However, Dunn says that at the regional levels at which he wrestles, participants sign a waiver and that there is typically no medical coverage "unless," he says, "there's a physician there who's a fan." Dunn says he seeks ongoing medical care for his injuries at the Iowa State University student health service. "They take care of the athletes on campus and seem to have a better understanding of my injuries," he says.

Andrews says that, unlike other athletes, professional wrestlers seem to have shorter career peaks and aren't as likely to have contracts that cover them during injury recovery. "Once they get hurt, they have to wrestle hurt, and many push too hard during injury recovery," he says.

Reports of anabolic steroid abuse, as in many other elite sports, have plagued professional wrestling. In 1991, a Pennsylvania physician who covered professional wrestling was sentenced to 3 years in federal prison for distributing anabolic steroids to professional wrestlers, including Hulk Hogan (3,4).

Copycat Concerns

Though there are no formal statistics on young people who are injured when they attempt to copy wrestling moves, at least one emergency department physician has noticed a pattern of injuries. "We saw a rash of copycat injuries last year," says John Brennan, MD, director of pediatric emergency medicine at St Barnabas Medical Center in Livingston, New Jersey. "Mainly musculoskeletal injuries, lacerations, and head injuries from throwing and flipping," he says. "The younger they are, the less they seem to realize that wrestling is choreographed."

Brennan says professional wrestling isn't the only "bad guy" in influencing kids' violence perceptions and their eagerness to act out action-figure scenarios. He says he worries about preteens and teens becoming desensitized to depictions of physical violence. "In video games people are thrown off buildings, and the opponents walk away at the end of the game," he says. "And no one is in the hospital in a halo."

Lisa Schnirring
Minneapolis

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Professional Wrestling Injuries in the News

A quick scan of several lay publications revealed a number of reports of injuries in professional wrestling. For example:

- Owen Hart died from injuries he sustained during a stunt at a World Wrestling Federation event in Kansas City, Missouri, in May 1999, when he fell from a catwalk to the ring floor.
- Darren Drozdov fractured two cervical vertebrae and underwent surgery in October 1999 when he was thrown to the mat by his opponent.
- Stone Cold Steve Austin was to undergo surgery in early 2000 to repair a midcervical bone spur and disk protrusion.
- Minnesota governor Jesse Ventura, a former pro wrestler, complained of back injuries during a speech to travel executives in July 1999. Though he declined further comment, his spokesperson said he aggravated an old back injury as a result of normal weekend activities.
- Actor Jim Carrey suffered a neck injury in September 1998 during a scene with professional wrestler Jerry Lawler.

Sources: *USA Today, New York Times,* Minneapolis *Star Tribune, Amusement Business*

Injury-Related Professional Wrestling Lingo

Most sports have their own lingo that's privy to participants, and professional wrestling is no exception. Here are some injury-related terms along with their "translations."

Selling the move: pretending to be in pain
Shoot: real pain
Working an injury: choreographing an injury
Taking the bump: being thrown and landing on the back
Getting stiffed: getting hit harder than expected
Crowbar: an opponent who hits harder than he or she is supposed to

Wrestler deaths as of 1999

Wrestler /Age/ Cause of Death/ Date

Andre Roussmoff (Andre the Giant) 46 heart attack 1/27/93 Kerry Adkisson (Kerry Von Erich) 33 suicide 2/18/93 Adolpho Bresciano (Dino Bravo) 44 murder 3/11/93 Larry Cameron 41 heart attack during match 12/13/93 Ray Canty (Ray Candy) 43 heart attack 5/23/94 Art Barr (Love Machine) 28 alcohol and pain killers 11/23/94 Jerry Blackwell (Crusher) 45 pneumonia 1/22/95 Thomas Gilbert III (Eddie Gilbert) 33 heart attack after using cocaine 2/18/95 John Minton (Big John Studd) 46 liver cancer 3/20/95 Hart Richard Murdoch (Dick Murdoch) 49 heart attack 6/15/96 Neil Caricole (Neil Superior) 33 heart attack after steroid use 8/23/96 Brian Pillman 35 heart attack after using cocaine 10/5/97 Louis Mucciolo (Louie Spicolli) 27 heart attack after using drugs and alcohol 2/15/98 Sylvester Ritter (Junkyard Dog) 45 auto accident 6/2/98 Brian Hauser (Shane Shamrock) 23 shot by police during domestic dispute 8/17/98 Richard Wilson (Renegade) 33 suicide 2/23/99 Owen Hart (Blue Blazer) 34 fell from ceiling cable during match 3/23/99 *Source: Wrestling Observer Newsletter.*

State laws and practices

New Rules in New York State

Wrestling Observer June 25th,2003

Drug testing being done at Frank Goodman's USA Pro Wrestling show a few weeks ago led to talk that the New York State Athletic Commission was going to start getting involved in drug screening of wrestlers, which isn't the case.

There was a bill passed called the Wrestlers Health and Safety Act that went into effect on October I, 2002, which coincided with the Athletic Commission taking less of an involvement in regulating pro wrestling. The new bill requires all promoters who run more than six shows during a calendar year in the state to have some sort of a written drug policy in place that includes educational material on drug usage. The WWE at this point was the only company the commission was aware ran six shows in New York since the law went into effect.. While the company does not do regular drug tests, and the law does not require drug testing, it's policy of having a written policy complies with the law. Because USA Pro Wrestling was coming up on its sixth show, it is establishing a policy. If a company wants to include drag testing as part of its policy, it must pay for the tests themselves and a failure of the rest does not require the license of a wrestler to be suspended in the state.

*** An important point of the new law is that from this point forward, only promoters have to be licensed. Wrestlers and managers no longer have to be. This does affect wrestling going forward. Probably the most notable case was years ago when the commission was testing Rodney Anoia (Yokozuna) for a license and found, due to obesity, that he was having heart problems. They suspended his license to wrestle, and because states are supposed to recognize suspensions, he was unable to wrestle in nearly half the states in the country. WWE, which had already put him in a diet program, which turned out to be unsuccessful, decided against using him further because of both concerns over his health, and because with so many states he couldn't be used in, it served no purpose to program him with someone.

Although if a company does drug test a wrestler and he fails, there is no mandate he has to be suspended, nor if he is suspended by a promotion, does any other promotion, even in the state, have to honor the suspension.

Pro wrestling in tussle with regulators over rules
State commission wants licensing (North Carolina)

By MOLLY HENNESSY-FISKE, Staff Writer,
Raleigh News and Observer

It wasn't supposed to end this way.

That's what Todd Harrison thought as he left the downtown Club Raleigh ring, plastic prizefighter belt in one hand and his bloody mouth in the other. He did not drive four hours from Roanoke, Va., to have his lip split before a crowd of less than 100, for a paycheck that barely covered his gasoline bill. Harrison, 28, is Southern Championship wrestler Dewey Cheatum, an undersized jail cook lured by the lavish lifestyle of televised pro wrestling but doubtful the hard knocks he takes are worth it.

Wrestlers on small-time local circuits suffer serious injuries regularly in the choreographed contest of brawn and bravado that is pro wrestling.

About half the states regulate pro wrestling, but not North Carolina, a longtime wrestling hotbed. Here, there are no minimum age or training requirements, no annual physicals or blood tests before a match, no doctors ringside. Here, there are only dreamers, dozens of would-be Ric Flairs who take their chances in makeshift rings in nightclubs, armories and high schools without age, health or safety protections.

The N.C. Boxing Commission, which also oversees kickboxing and toughman events, wants to add pro wrestling to its domain. But it has yet to win permission from state lawmakers and faces staunch opposition from many wrestlers and promoters.

Industry officials say there are more than 200 pro wrestlers in North Carolina, compared with 200 licensed in South Carolina this year and 1,500 in Virginia. Wrestlers often move among the three states, working for the two dozen promoters in each.

Most local pro wrestlers survive a string of minor injuries. They routinely experience moments of temporary paralysis called "stingers." They face opponents who cut, or "juice," themselves to bleed dramatically. And they wrestle hurt, wearing neck and knee braces in the ring.

They either hit the big time or retire, seldom by choice.

Curtis White doesn't wrestle anymore. He cuts hair. He wears his own in a spiky crew cut with thick-framed glasses: the retro barber look. Leaning over a customer at an East Raleigh barber shop, the only sign of "Toad," White's wrestling persona, are tattoos of blue and green vines that snake up both beefy forearms.

At 32, White still dreams of wrestling but is under doctor's orders not to enter the ring. An MRI recently confirmed that a bone inside his right shoulder is hollow. If he falls on it again, it could shatter.

His last fall in the wrestling ring -- on April Fool's Day two years ago -- broke his shoulder in four places. He continued wrestling, just as he did when he broke his tailbone three years before.

"If you don't wrestle, you don't get paid," he said. "I knew what my limits were, what I could and couldn't do. At least, I thought I did."

White attended N.C. State University and served with the Marines during the 1991 Persian Gulf War. He was used to breaking everything: his other shoulder, ribs, even his nose twice in one weekend. White had trained with the best, at the World Championship Wrestling Power Plant wrestling school in Atlanta.

But at 5 feet 10 and 215 pounds, he was small and had to rely on table crashing and bloody barbed wire antics to rile the crowd, he said. He traveled with WWE stars of the future, including the Hardy Boys and Shane "Hurricane" Helms. When the aches became too much, he popped painkillers.

State regulations would not have better trained him, White said, but they could have forced him to retire before his string of injuries became so serious.

"Had I had it [his shoulder] checked earlier, I probably would have stopped sooner," he said.

The N.C. Boxing Commission supports a provision, cut from a bill two years ago, that would bring pro wrestlers under its authority.

"They're trying to get people's attention, so they cut themselves -- that's HIV and hepatitis right there," Commission Chairman Frank Douglas said. "... These guys don't care. They want to make it to the big leagues."

Douglas would like the bleeding to stop. He wants to send the 27 commission agents who visit boxing bouts to oversee wrestling. He wants wrestlers to demonstrate their training before they enter the ring and submit a record of physicals and serious injuries. And he wants wrestlers and their promoters to pay for the regulations.

The commission's new executive director, Roger Hutchings, who took over this month, said that he agrees with Douglas and that regulating pro wrestling is already on his agenda. But there's no pending legislation. Under the most recent bill, wrestlers would pay $25 a year, officials $50 and promoters $300, similar to what the boxing industry pays. To get a license, promoters would have to provide $2,500 in medical insurance per wrestler or post an equal cash bond.

That would raise about $142,000 a year, enough for the commission to break even for the first time since 1995-96, the year it was created, according to state financial records. Since its inception, it has spent $1.3 million and brought in $247,664, mostly in fees.

Congress required states that hold professional boxing matches to create commissions in 1996, largely to protect boxers from unscrupulous promoters. Some states require pro-wrestling promoters to pay for insurance, and the strictest also protect wrestlers from themselves -- from the urge to skip training or take chances in the ring.

To be licensed in South Carolina or Virginia, wrestlers must be at least 18, pass annual physicals and, like promoters, pay a fee. State agents visit matches to ensure participants and promoters are licensed and insured.

"We're not inventing this," Douglas said. "The fees are not extraordinary. You don't want wrestlers getting injured or exploited."

But some wrestlers and promoters suspect the commission has its own best interests at heart.

"They need to find themselves a way to make money," said state Sen. Hugh Webster, a Yanceyville Republican who voted against creating a boxing commission and opposes expanding its power or budget. "Why don't we put ballerina dancing under the boxing commission?" he asked. "That's more dangerous than wrestling."

Promoter Jeff Rudd, 36, of Burlington has been in the business for 18 years and led the lobby against wrestling regulation two years ago. He said the cost of insurance to cover wrestlers' injuries would devastate his business and wouldn't make it any safer. "It's just a money grab," he said. "There would be no wrestling in North Carolina, because we couldn't afford to put it on."

Harrison, the struggling wrestler, realizes regulations would force him to pay a licensing fee and probably get more insurance. But he thinks safety rules, enforced fairly, would clean up the business. In the meantime, he tries to regulate himself. He doesn't bleed intentionally if an opponent looks too "scraggly." And he doesn't take too many risks in the ring.

"I'm not going to get paralyzed or broke because somebody wanted to hit me with a trash can," said Harrison, who has liquid stitches holding his lip together after the mishap at Club Raleigh.

Of course, he can't control his opponents. "There's guys out there that I wouldn't trust to put me in a headlock," he said. "States that have regulated wrestling don't have that problem."

Legislators propose 'wrestling' law (Illinois)
Friday, August 29, 2003

By Chris Hack
Chicago Daily Southtown
Staff writer

Two freshman state legislators said Thursday they'll fight for a law that would warn kids not to try the moves they see performed at professional wrestling matches.

Joined by Illinois State Crime Commission Director Jerry Elsner, state Reps. Kevin Joyce (D-Worth) and Paul Froelich (R-Schaumburg) said they want to see a disclaimer precede the performances as well as before the popular wrestling shows aired on several networks.

"A lot of kids try to mimic the moves that well-trained athletes perform," Joyce said. "This is not real wrestling - this is not real sports. But they portray this as real - my own child thinks it's real."

Elsner said the initiative was prompted by a Naperville teen who was paralyzed after another boy subjected him to a "piledriver."

"People have to realize this is not real," Elsner said, adding that the wrestler-actors are "steroid-induced freaks" who should not be emulated.

Although Joyce said a draft of the bill is being prepared, it was unclear how an Illinois law would affect taped and broadcast performances from other states.

But the wrestling disclaimer proponents said they hope Illinois can prompt a federal requirement.

Sports and entertainment lawyer F. James Foley said the measure could potentially protect the professional wrestling industry from personal injury lawsuits - and that it should be viewed as no different than the warnings that run during car commercials that professional drivers are performing on a closed course.

Mark Roth, Inlewd.com editorial, Sept. 8/2003 (Delaware)

DOVER UPDATE. The City Council of Dover, Delaware has made it clear the ordinance they are proposing (scheduled to be voted on earlier this afternoon) is basically their attempt to shut down Combat Zone Wrestling of New Jersey. There is a column up at DelawareOnline.com about this situation. The column contains quotes which state the ordinance is an attempt to prevent CZW from running shows in Dover, Delaware.

The ordinance actually prohibits "foreign objects" from being used in wrestling matches. It states "no professional wrestling matches in which anything but the human body or boxing gloves are used would be allowed to take place within the city limits.". This in itself would be far reaching in regards to even what WWE could or could not do when running shows in Dover, however; the City Council has made it abundantly clear the ordinance does not include WWE. So yes, WWE can continue to use "foreign objects" when in Dover, Delaware.

James Kozel, an owner of a local bar in Dover, has hired a lawyer to attempt to squash this ordinance. Kozel wants to continue to host CZW shows at his bar and he has told people if the ordinance was passed today he would still run CZW shows. Kozel's argument is that as an "adult" he should be able to determine what type of "entertainment" he wants to pay to see.

Entertainment

Circuses

EUROCRATS DECREE TRAPEZE ARTISTS SHALL WEAR HARD HATS

David Sapsted
The Daily Telegraph

Trapeze artists with one of the world's most famous circuses have been told to start wearing hard hats to comply with new European Union safety rules.

Jugglers, tightrope walkers and other acrobats with the Moscow State Circus, now touring London, have also been instructed to don safety headware because of European regulations covering workers employed at heights greater than the average stepladder.

The circuses insurer has warned the performers they risk losing their coverage if they are injured in the course of their work without the protection of hard hats.

"It is a bureaucracy gone mad with a lot of help from the current compensation culture," said Paul Archer, general manager of the circus.

"Our insurance premiums have skyrocketed in recent years and our insurers are always looking at ways to limit liability. This is just another step in that process."

At a circus meeting yesterday afternoon, the performers decided to go ahead without the benefit of the headgear for their performance later in the day at the southern resort of Folkestone.

"We have informed the insurers that we will wear the hats when erecting the circus or during rehearsals" said John Haze, a spokesman for the 86 year old circus.." but it is ridiculous to suggest that the performers actually wear them during shows."

Goussein Khamdoulev, 48, who performs without a safety net as part of the highest indoor tightrope act in Europe, scoffed at the idea a hard hat would be much use to him if he fell 14 meters to the ring below.

He once fell 7.5 meters during a performance once in Rio de Janeiro, breaking both arms and three of his ribs. " A hard hat wouldn't have helped me then and it won't help me now. Working in the circus, you get injured all the time. But you just have to get over it."

Mr. Archer added, "the hats could be more of a liability than anything else. They could slip over the artists eyes or throw the performers off balance. This is just another loony law from Brussels and we are the only country stupid enough to pay any attention."

The insurers, a consortium of seven companies providing coverage for the circus during their remaining four months of its British tour, warned about the necessity for safety helmets in a faxed advisory notice on Monday. A spokesman for the Association of British Insurers said the issue of circus safety has "no set guidelines."

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March 1, 2004

PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT RELEASES WRESTLING SAFETY REPORT

The provincial government today released a report called Study of Safety in Professional Wrestling in Manitoba which includes recommendations for improving safety standards and practices for professional wrestling.

"The workplace safety of Manitobans is important to us all," said Culture, Heritage and Tourism Minister Eric Robinson, minister responsible for sport. "Professional wrestling, though defined in Manitoba as entertainment rather than sport, calls for a high degree of athleticism. Wrestlers, promoters and venue operators all have important roles to play to ensure the safety of performers and spectators."

The consultants who prepared the report concluded that it is important for the industry to self-regulate and act in its own best interests to promote safety.

"Our Workplace Safety Act, which was updated in 2002, provides an adequate mechanism to deal with safety and health matters in the workplace," said Labour and Immigration Minister Nancy Allan. "In this area, there is an increased degree of responsibility on venue owners and employers to maintain adequate safety standards."

Since deregulation in 1996, predetermined, staged combative displays such as professional wrestling are not considered sport in Manitoba and are not regulated by the Manitoba Boxing Commission or the Prize Fighting provisions of the Criminal Code of Canada.

Amateur, Olympic-style wrestling is a competition sport, and as such is regulated by the appropriate sport governing bodies.

- more -

"We encourage the industry to establish a self-regulatory mechanism such as the safety council proposed in the report," said Robinson. "And we thank the consulting group and its principal consultant, Martin Boroditsky, for their diligence in producing this comprehensive report."

The full provincial government response to the report can be found on the Internet at http://www.gov.mb.ca/govresp.html.

Information about the Workplace Safety and Health Act can be obtained from Manitoba Labour and Immigration at 204-945-3446.

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For information about the report, contact: Diane Coble-Kendall, 204-945-3811.